

International Herald Tribune  
Culture  
27.08.2008



ShanghART, Shanghai

"In Inscription Nr. 3" (2008), by Wei Guangqing, an acrylic on canvas from ShanghART. The gallery is taking part in Singapore Showcase, a contemporary art fair running Sept. 9-12 that the curators say is modeled on Art Basel and the Armory Show in New York, with 23 major international galleries in attendance.

## Casting Asia as a player in the A-list art game

By **Sonia Kolesnikov-Jessop**

Published: August 25, 2008

**SINGAPORE:** Asian contemporary art has seen its star rise markedly in recent years. Yet the region has yet to produce art fairs to rival those in the West like Art Basel in Switzerland, Frieze Art Fair in London, the Armory Show in New York and Art Basel Miami Beach.

In the past year, two new contemporary art fairs have gained considerable attention because of their sheer size - ShContemporary in September in Shanghai and Art HK in May in Hong Kong - but they are still far from being seen as equal to their Western counterparts.

Now, a new entrant, Singapore Showcase, is also hoping to be noticed. With 23 major international galleries, it is very much a boutique fair, but those attending include marquee names in international contemporary art: Sperone Westwater and L&M Arts from New York to Galerie

Thaddaeus Ropac from Paris, SCAI the Bathhouse and Tomio Koyama from Tokyo, Arario Gallery from Seoul, Hanart TZ from Hong Kong and ShanghART from Shanghai.

"It would be enormously presumptuous to say we're going to be the Basel of Asia, but the standards that we're trying to push here and emulate are those of the Armory or Basel, on a smaller scale," said Mary Dinaburg, principal of Fortune Cookie Projects, the curatorial and art advisory consultancy behind the new fair, which runs Sept. 9-12 and coincides with the opening of the second Singapore Biennale.

Dinaburg has been an adviser to the Armory show for the last three years and along with her partner, Howard Rutkowski, was also on the advisory board of Art HK 08. They joined forces to form Fortune Cookie Projects in 2006, and both have a wealth of experience in the art world.

## Today in Culture

Dinaburg has served as the director of New York galleries like Avenue B and Jack Shainman Gallery in the 1980s, and she established Dinaburg Arts in 1993 to provide curatorial advice and consultation services. Rutkowski has had a long career at Sotheby's and then Bonhams.

The two have just established a regional headquarters in Singapore, and Rutkowski will transfer from London to Singapore later this year. The decision to open an office in Asia is a reflection of the rise of Asian art and the importance of Asian collectors in the world market, they said.

"All the international art world knows that Asia is beginning to be a major player and will be even more so," Dinaburg said. "Galleries, artists, museums want to be in this part of the world, but they don't know it, so for us it's a perfect opportunity to work with them, to be their outpost."

"We like Asia; we think it is the future," added Rutkowski. "There are a lot of opportunities here from a business point of view, but there is also a real interest for everyone to get together. More importantly, the art world has started to globalize.

"We're no longer talking about China as a separate market or Indonesia as a separate market, and no artist wishes to be referred to as an 'Asian' artist. They just want to be part of the international art community."

While the partners considered several locations, including Shanghai and Hong Kong, they say they finally decided on Singapore because of its central geographical position in the region and its wide use of English. **But most importantly, it is a financial hub for private wealth, and the city is setting up a free port with what Rutkowski called a "Fort Knox-like," state-of-the-art facility to house works from all over the world.**

**Right now, the only other free ports for art are in Zurich and Geneva, he said. With a gross floor area of approximately 22,500 square meters, or more than 242,000 square feet, for Phase 1 (and an additional 24,000 square meters for Phase 2, to be completed in 2011), the Singapore FreePort will include showrooms, workshops, photo studios and private offices. Due to be completed toward the end of next year, it will be directly accessible to Changi Airport.**

**"The FreePort is a huge asset to the development of the art market here," Rutkowski said. "There will be huge, secure warehouses, with no duty or taxes paid; a place for people to park their art safely for as long as they want and in total confidentiality."**

"We also felt Singapore was a better place to set up shop than Hong Kong, because it has a much better infrastructure in terms of museums and exhibition spaces. Hong Kong doesn't have space. When we did the Julian Schnabel show we had to transform office space, because major contemporary artworks, such as his, require proper presentation."