

ON THE UP



*These six young artists from Hong Kong
are making waves in the city and abroad.
Oliver Giles finds out how*

Photography **NIC AND BEX GAUNT**



TREVOR YEUNG

“There are around 200 plants in my studio,” says Trevor Yeung. But all of this greenery isn’t decorative—it is part of Yeung’s art. For nearly 10 years, Yeung has been making installations that combine living vegetation (and sometimes even aquariums filled with live fish) with his photography and sculptures.

Aside from exploring big ideas about the natural world, many of Yeung’s works also poignantly reflect on love and loss. The titles of some pieces, such as *I Think You Better Leave Now* (2015), suggest some of Yeung’s art is inspired by his own life. “Intimacy is important in my artworks,” says Yeung. “And not only intimacy between the audience and the artworks, but also between myself and the material.”

These works have resonated with audiences around the world. Last year alone, Yeung had a solo show at Blindspot Gallery in Hong Kong and took part in group exhibitions in Mainland China, the US, Belgium, Italy, Ireland, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Poland. This month, he will add France to that long list when his solo show opens at Galerie Allen in Paris on March 14. After that, Yeung is planning to revive one of his past series. “I’m going back to my aquarium projects,” he says. “It’s something about guppy fish—I’ve been thinking about it for two years.”



OSCAR CHAN YIK-LONG

The fact that Oscar Chan Yik-long titled one of his installations “Awful things happen in every apartment house” might give you some insight into his work. Inspired by the emotion of fear and dark tales from mythology, Chan’s drawings and paintings often feature ghosts, skulls, demons and disembodied heads, some of them screaming in terror.

These works have struck a nerve both in Hong Kong and internationally. In 2015, he had a solo exhibition at Observation Society in Guangzhou entitled *The Devil, Probably*. A solo show at *Things That Can Happen in Hong Kong* followed, and Chan has since participated in group shows at Para Site and Gallery Exit. Abroad, his work has been included in exhibitions in Paris, Shanghai and—last year—the Busan Biennale in South Korea.

His work is now being shown by Gallery Exit at Art Basel in Hong Kong and he is making works for a group exhibition in Nice hosted by the roving Circonstance Galerie. Unlike many of Chan’s past works, which feature black ink painted on white canvas, paper or silk, some of these works will include colour. “Colour is a new direction for me,” he says. “I’m studying how to [use] unfamiliar materials and formats in my artworks. And recently I’ve been addicted to studying how directors of horror films create tension and use colours, lights and sounds for effects. It’s really related to my artistic practice.”

CHLOË CHEUK

In 2017, Chloë Cheuk installed three crystal balls on a terrace at the Asia Society that looked down over Central and Victoria Harbour. Visitors could wander up to the installation and peer into the globes—perhaps into the city’s future. But as you looked into the orbs, the skyline flipped upside down, then skyscrapers started melting into each other, removing all of Hong Kong’s defining features.

Many critics saw this as a statement about Hong Kong’s blurry identity, a city struggling with its history as a British colony and its future as part of Mainland China. Political messages aside, this sculpture is characteristic of Cheuk’s art, which seeks to provide new perspectives on objects, places and even relationships that we might normally take for granted.

Cheuk’s work is on show this month at Karin Weber Gallery’s booth at Art Central and in a site-specific exhibition that is taking place in the H Queen’s fire escape. “The exhibition seeks to explore notions of detachment in the concrete jungle,” Cheuk explains. “I’m including an old work from 2015–2017 called *Homeless ...* [that] raises questions about society’s treatment of the homeless community, and another newly commissioned work that examines how fragile our relationships are nowadays.”



CHENG TING TING

While many young artists experiment with state-of-the-art digital media, Cheng Ting Ting has always been happy to stick with old-fashioned painting. “I love the passivity of painting,” Cheng explains. “Often in the contemporary art world, we come across installation artworks, which I find quite aggressive because behind [these] artworks are a series of concepts the viewer is expected to know. The same is not expected when you see a painting. It sits on the wall and if you like it you can enter into its world, and if not you can just walk by.”

Few people walk by Cheng’s paintings. Often bright and colourful, many of them depict items or scenes from the artist’s everyday life, ranging from tiny blades of grass painted on a sheet of postcard-sized paper to three-metre-long canvasses that feature rows of bunk beds in a dorm room. These have been shown at Gallery Exit in Hong Kong, which represents Cheng, and at various non-profits, including Para Site and the K11 Art Foundation’s Chi Art Space.

Today, Cheng is busy making new work. “At the moment, I’m working on my paintings, and making some drawings, collages and occasionally some tiny sculptures,” she says. If you want to see these works for yourself, visit Gallery Exit in May, when some of them will be unveiled.

KINGSLEY NG

Kingsley Ng's art rarely fits inside the walls of a gallery. Instead, it pops up at unexpected locations around the city, often transforming the mundane into the magical. In 2017, he converted a Hong Kong tram into a moving camera obscura, projecting images from the world outside into the tram itself. A year later, he adapted a cavernous underground storm water storage tank into a moving multi-sensory experience complete with a light show, music and a fabric installation.

In addition to creating these installations, which can take years to produce, Ng works as an assistant professor at Baptist University, teaching courses such as media art and experience design. "I'm now working with a professor from the physics department to deliver a new cross-disciplinary course about understanding light from the perspectives of both art and science," says Ng. "One of the highlights of my career is seeing a good number of our graduates involved in the cultural scene today."



XYZA CRUZ BACANI

Xyza Cruz Bacani was living in Hong Kong and working as a domestic helper when, in 2009, she asked her employer to buy her a camera. On her one day off a week, Bacani began taking high-contrast, black-and-white photos and posting them to Facebook, where they caught the eye of professional photographers and, eventually, the editors of the New York Times. In 2014, she was profiled for the first time on the newspaper's photography-focused Lens blog while still working as a cleaner and nanny.

That article changed her life. The following year, Bacani was awarded a Human Rights Fellowship by photography agency Magnum and travelled to the US to study at New York University's Tisch School for the Arts. She has since had exhibitions at the Hong Kong Arts Centre, the Bangkok Arts and Culture Centre and the International Photography Hall of Fame and Museum in Missouri, among others, all of them shining a light on issues of labour, migration and human rights.

Bacani published her first photo book, *We Are Like Air*, late last year. "It took us two years to complete the project," she says. "When I finally saw the book last November, it was cathartic." The title refers to the way Bacani believes migrant workers are often treated in Hong Kong—like air, migrant workers are "invisible but important." And Bacani isn't stopping there. Publisher WE Press is already working on Bacani's second book and, this May, Christine Park Gallery in New York will host a solo exhibition of Bacani's photographs.

