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Taipei Dangdai 2020 kicks off the year with the 2nd edition of this phenomenal art fair. Three participating gallerists share their thoughts, goals and visions for the fair - and the future.



Taipei Dangdai 2019. Courtesy of Taipei Dangdai

Like many islands, Taiwan appears to be dwarfed by adjacent sprawling landmasses— in its case the politically and literally looming Mainland China— standing out on the map only because of its solitary state in the placid sea. Also like many islands, it is an idiosyncratic cosmopolitan hub that flies under the radar, but once it catches your attention, it becomes apparent that it is as powerful as it is unassuming. Rich in history, modest in conduct, quiet yet effective in strategy, and thrumming with unbound creativity and curiosity, the Republic of China might just be the new locus of contemporary art in Asia. This January, they are hosting the second edition of Taipei Dangdai, the highly anticipated world-class art fair that played a major role in Taiwan's recent prominence in the market, to launch 2020. They will present 99 galleries, 23 of which have permanent spaces in Taiwan.

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Rejoining this year are three accomplished women with galleries based in Taipei— Tina Keng, Founder and Director of Tina Keng Gallery; Gladys Lin, Director of Sean Kelly Gallery; and Yaji Huang, Founder and Director of Each Modern.



Left to right: Gladys Lin, Tina Keng and Yaji Huang

Having received over 28,000 visitors, TP 2019 was what propelled the region to international focus, but the attention they are finally receiving is no doubt an honest response to the years of reformation, dynamism and hard work that took place. While the limelight switched rapidly between various East Asian locations in the last decade— Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, to name a few— Taiwan has been slowly and methodically building their art scene. "The Taiwanese are very curious people. We are always learning, always asking questions," Gladys Lin maintains. "Our clients are worldly and well-travelled."

The global perspective and adaptiveness of Taiwan is not surprising. A look at their history reveals constant exposure, including their colonization by the Dutch, Spanish and Japanese. Surrounded by equally adventurous and heterogenous neighbors, the enduring island-state continues to encounter different cultures at a frequency that has only increased. With the lifting of the martial law in 1987, society became more vibrant as artists devoted themselves to creative practices with renewed vigor. This open-mindedness and assimilation, according to Tina Keng, is what makes Taiwan a pioneer in contemporary Asian art. "Because of our liberal atmosphere, we embrace this and encourage artists to study abroad." In fact, the upsurge of modern painting in Taiwan was an influence of American Abstract Expressionism, and the breakthrough for Tina Keng Gallery coincided with the School of Paris turning to the development of 20th century modern Chinese painting. Keng attributes the gallery's successful management of overseas Chinese artists such as Zhao Wuji (Zao Wu-Ki) and Chang Yu (Sanyu) to their thorough understanding of Western art. Having operated in Taiwan for 3 decades, they are a premier gallery in Taiwan and Asia.

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Antony Gormley. Big Form, 2015. Mild steel bar. 114 x 93 x 102cm. Courtesy Sean Kelly.

Globalism is not just a clever business approach. As East-West interchanges reach its pinnacle, it has become our everyday reality as well as the narrative of the galleries, if not the whole art industry. Is maintaining and promoting the unique Taiwan heritage a priority? "I never think of myself as a Taiwanese gallery, but a gallery focusing on Asian art," Yaji Huang explains. "It's important for an Asian gallery to stand out but this is not against internationalization. On the contrary, I think the more international galleries involve the local market, the more the market can mature."

Taiwan's smallness is a drawback to the prospect of a thriving art market circle, like the one enjoyed in Mainland China and the West, and so the local industry must be more competitive. However, Huang does not agree that they should follow any other models (as much as she admires David Zwirner). Taiwan may be small, but it has its own advantages: a strong community of collectors, inquisitive artists, originality. "Rather than presenting ourselves as a 'Taiwanese' front, it is more productive to show our universal languages. I believe all my artists to have that quality."

What can we look forward to from each gallery in TD 2020? What are the goals going forward?

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"The goals are the same," Lin says with a smile. "Sean Kelly has been doing this for 30 years. We just want more people to understand what we do." They are presenting a very ambitious list of artists, among them Antony Gormley, with whom they've worked with since the '80s; Mariko Mori, whose sculptures were lauded in the first edition; and Su Xiaobai, a Chinese artist who spent a long time in Dusseldorf, Germany. Their efforts extend beyond the fair. Sean Kelly is doing more programs following the concept of a 'conversation show'— for example, the group exhibition *Paradise Lost* at JUT Art Museum, happening concurrently.

Each Modern, formerly known as aura gallery taipei until Huang renamed it in 2018, is a young gallery but already a veteran in facilitating dialogue between local and international artists. They host a joint-party with Axel Vervoordt Gallery this year, and will do so as they do every year with Lisson Gallery, and Tomio Koyama Gallery for the second edition of their Taipei Dangdai Party. In addition to their many partnerships with Asian masters and the vintage Japanese book dealer 'nitesha,' they are also known for the rediscovery of Hilo Chen, the only Taiwanese artist important to Photorealism in the United States during the '80s. He will be part of the exhibition 70/20 for Dangdai 2020, which looks to creating an intergenerational dialogue from the '70s until now, and showcase their strength in Postwar and Contemporary art.

Tina Keng Gallery, which is committed to promoting artists in multi-faceted ways, will be featuring *Collection of Time Pieces*, also an intergenerational dialogue, with six artists. They create images in a wide range of styles reflective of their times and influences.

Dangdai is the Chinese word for 'present time.' Taipei Dangdai 2019 explored the past, but Dangdai 2020 is set on the future. Which, according to these three leading ladies of Taipei, is looking bright. That there is still work to do is an exciting prospect, not a daunting one. "A gallery has to be very creative all the time," says Huang. "And it is what I really enjoy."

Taipei Dangdai will run from January 17 to January 19, 2020 at the Nangang Exhibition Center, Taipei, Taiwan