



CUHK Business School Conference



## Sketch Hong Kong exhibition shows how art is flowering in the grassroots

A fresh perspective on a growing art movement in the city.

BY **ENID TSUI**

1 JUL 2016

A few years ago, people in Hong Kong started using the phrase “lei dei”, meaning “lifted off the ground”, to describe politicians and officials deemed too detached from the real world. Today, the phrase is used to attack anything that challenges the intellect or purse. Abstract, conceptual art and the prices it commands at auction are easy targets.

There is nothing abstract or expensive about the ongoing exhibition at Pacific Place, in Admiralty. Organised by a group called Sketch Hong Kong, the show is as grassroots as art gets. Displayed are sketches of Hong Kong by 34 amateur artists, who work en plein air, and sell their pieces for HK\$380 each, or HK\$580 framed. The money goes to the Hong Kong Society for Education in Art, a 24-year-old charity that promotes creativity and art appreciation among the young.

The 58 sketches are mostly of buildings, street scenes and local dishes. True, the quality varies. But sketches have an immediacy that gives them easy charm, even if the hand that executes them is not professionally trained.

That may explain why sketching has become popular in Hong Kong. Last month, another non-profit local group, the Urban Sketchers, celebrated its third anniversary with an exhibition at the Fringe Club. There's also the much older Hong Kong Sketching Society, which was established in 1978.

Contemporary art dealer Calvin Hui, who founded Sketch Hong Kong two years ago, says the group sketches for enjoyment, not for profit, and sells only to raise money for charities.

“We don't want to charge so much that people will be put off coming. We want art lovers of all kinds to come to the exhibition,” Hui says.



Man Mo Temple, by Yip Suen-fat.

For each outing it organises, in addition to an art instructor, Sketch Hong Kong books a heritage guide to provide the history of the area and the buildings before the sketchers get down to work. One regular participant is Yip Suen-fat, a former electrical engineer in his 70s who took up the art form only recently.

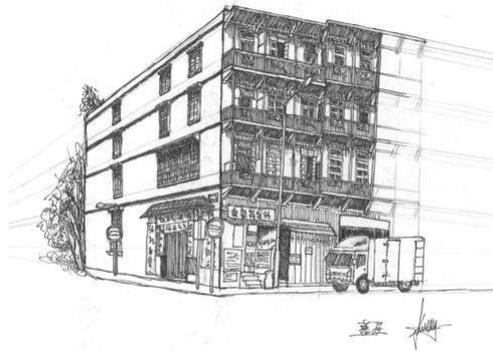
“I became really ill a few years ago and was forced to retire. My family worried that I spent too much time at home so they urged me to take up sketching. I'd never done any art before and now I go sketching once or twice a week,” he says.

His impressions of Man Mo Temple, Ping Shan Heritage Trail and the Yau Ma Tei fruit market are in the exhibition. They are serious works. Despite knowing nothing about perspective just two years ago, his inexperience is imperceptible.

“If nothing else, I'm getting some sun and fresh air. It certainly takes me to many parts of Hong Kong I'd never seen before,” he says.

Antony Choy Yat-chun, a 32-year-old office administrator, is another newbie. He joined the group in 2014 after spotting a gathering of the Urban Sketchers outside the Blue House, in Wan Chai. He had dabbled in painting before, but fancied making art with other people.

"It's great being able to interact with fellow sketchers. I also like a chance to slow down from my normal pace of life and just sit and watch a place for hours," he says.



The Blue House, by Anthony Choy.

Surprisingly, Hui says this form is not so distant from the upper strata of contemporary art in which he makes his living.

"I tell my gallery patrons about this and they think it's interesting because they like art and they are usually interested in local culture, too," he says.

Choy doesn't collect art but he does attend Art Basel Hong Kong and the Affordable Art Fair. He doesn't like everything he sees at the big shows, but he doesn't think the works are lei dei.

"I go because I want to see what other artists do," he says.

The "Sketch Hong Kong" exhibition will run at Pacific Place, Admiralty, until July 10. The exhibition then moves to 3812 Gallery, 118 Queen's Road West, Sai Ying Pun, from July 15 to 30.

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