

# ASIAN ART

THE NEWSPAPER FOR COLLECTORS, DEALERS, MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES · DECEMBER 2012 · £5.00/US\$10/€10

## Chinese & Japanese Auctions Still Performing in London

THE CHINESE and Japanese sales in London during Asian Art in London continued to bring respectable results for the auction houses, especially works at the top end of the market – with strong performances from Qing ceramics and highs and lows in the Japanese sales.

At Bonhams, a large wood *netsuke* of a tiger, height 4.5 cm, carved by Naito Toyomasa (1773-1856), Tanba, early 19th century, was the top item sold on 6 November. It achieved a world record for a Toyomasa *netsuke*, selling for £103,250. His previous record was a £85,250 for a *netsuke* from the Szechenyi Collection. The second highest lot sold for £73,250, a print by Toshusai Sharaku (fl. circa 1794-1795), depicting a popular Japanese *kabuki* actor in one of the female roles for which he was famous: *Segawa Tomisaburo II in the role of Yadorigi*, the wife of Ogishi Kurando, in the play *Hana-ayame Bunroku Soga* (The Iris Soga [brothers] Story of the Bunroku Period. Also selling well was a black lacquer, four-case *inro* by Shibata Zeshin (1807-1891), Meiji period, which sold for £56,450. The combined total for this Japanese sale was £2,085,000. The total for the three sales: Fine Japanese Art, Fine Chinese Art and

Chinese & Other Asian Works of Art totalled £9,417,888.

Christie's series comprised four Asian sales (Chinese and Japanese) held between 6 and 9 November, which totalled £14.8 million. The top lot from Fine Chinese Ceramics & Works of Art on 6 November was a pair of *cloisonné* enamel figures of rams with riders, Qianlong period, incised with four-character marks and of the period (1736-1795), which sold for £457,250 (est. £150-250,000). In the Japanese sale, on 7 November, a pair of Kaiemon figures of Karashishi, Edo period (late 17th century) was the top lot, selling for £133,250 (est. £120-150,000). At the Chinese Interiors sale, 7 November, a set of four paintings of Immortals from the 19th/20th century, was that sale's top lot, achieving £43,250 (est. £1000-1,500). The Chinese Ceramics, Works of Art and Textiles sale on 9 November totalled £3.49 million, with 76% sold by lot. Here, the top lot was a *famille-rose* landscape vase, signed by Guo Baochang, dated to the sixth year of the republic (1917), four-character Juren Tang mark, which sold for £127,250 against an estimate of £10-15,000.

At Sotheby's the combined Chinese sales total (three sales held on 7 November), was just

behind Christie's combined total at £14,721,050. These sales featured private collections of Qing ceramics. The highlight of the auction series was an underglaze-blue polychrome-enamelled 'Magpie and Prunus' Moonflask, Qianlong seal mark and period from the Collection of Caleem Halim, which sold for £1,049,250, more than double pre-sale expectations (est. £300-£500,000). Other top lots included a *famille-rose* Dragon and Phoenix vase, Jiaqing seal mark and period, which sold for £361,250, more than trebling its pre-sale estimate of £80-120,000. Also selling well over estimate was a white-glaze relief-carved vase, Qianlong seal mark and period, which achieved £193,250. From the Peter and Nancy Thompson Collection, the top lots went over estimate with a Dehua flue, Xia, 17th/18th century estimated at £12-18,000 selling for £181,250 leading the way, a blue-and-white, pear-shaped vase, circa 1640-1660 selling for £157,250 (est. £20-30,000) and a blue-and-white 'seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove' brushpot (*bitong*), Kangxi period, selling for £103,250 (est. £20-30,000). Away from ceramics, a pair of *huanghuali* 'Official's Hat' yokeback armchairs (*guanmaoyi*), sold for £847,60 (est. £70-90,000).



Netsuke figure of a tiger by Naito Toyomasa (1773-1856), Tanba, early 19th century, height 4.5 cm, sold for £103,250 (est. £35-40,000), at Bonhams on 6 November. A world record for the artist.

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### news in brief

#### ASIA SOCIETY BERNARD SCHWARZ BOOK AWARD

*Water: Asia's New Battleground* (Georgetown University Press) by Brahma Chellaney has won the 2012 Asia Society Bernard Schwartz Book Award. Dr. Chellaney, a professor of strategic studies at the Centre for Policy Research in New Delhi, will be honoured and presented with a US\$20,000 prize at a special event to be held at Asia Society's headquarters in New York City on 23 January, 2013.

The Asia Society Bernard Schwartz Book Award is the only award that recognises non-fiction books for their outstanding contributions to the understanding of contemporary Asia or US-Asia relations, as well as potential policy impacts relating to the region. *Water: Asia's New Battleground* was selected from nearly 90 nominations submitted by US and Asia-based publishers for books published in 2011.

#### THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG LIBRARIES

The University Libraries and The University Museum and Art Gallery, The University of Hong Kong are jointly presenting an exhibition *Celebrating the Centenary: Gems of the University of Hong Kong Libraries* to commemorate the centenary of University Libraries and the 80th anniversary of the establishment of the Fung Ping Shan Library.

On display will be over 100 rare books, manuscripts and artefacts from the University Libraries, including letters and manuscripts by renowned scholars, maps and rubbings, as well as imprints dated to the 13th and 14th centuries. Highlights include *An Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China* written by Sir George Staunton (1737-1801) in 1798, *The Hongkong Almanack and Directory* for 1846: with an appendix compiled by William Tarrant (1820-1872) in 1846, *Essays on Self-discipline* dated 1234, and *Collection of Random Sketches*, a handwritten copy dated to the Ming dynasty (1369-1644).

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**The Asian Art Newspaper**  
Vol 16 Issue 2  
Published by  
Asian Art Newspaper Ltd,  
London

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Esecure payment system available  
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for back issues, subscriptions and  
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## Changes of address

Information as above

## Annual print subscription

(10 issues a year)  
UK £45  
Rest of Europe £50  
Rest of World £55  
US residents US\$90  
(including airmail postage)  
**£30/US\$48 digital subscription**

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ISSN 1460-8537

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## Ran Hwang

By OLIVIA SAND

A fashion enthusiast, Ran Hwang found a way to include a number of elements mostly related to the fashion industry into her art. Relying on buttons and sometimes also adding thread, she completes spectacular pieces featuring an imagery reminiscent of her native Korea. Over the years, her practice has become more and more sophisticated, adding growing detail and complexity to her work. Whether depicting a landscape, trees, temples or a Buddha, the three dimensional aspect of the works make her large pieces and wall-installations all the more striking. Currently based in New York, Ran Hwang (b. 1960) has followed an interesting trajectory that she shares with the Asian Art Newspaper.



Ran Hwang. All images courtesy of the artist and Leila Heller Gallery, New York.

**ASIAN ART NEWSPAPER:** Your curriculum is very unusual as you came to New York for a (Bachelor of Fine Arts) BFA and subsequently went back to Korea for a (Master of Fine Arts) MFA. Most students from abroad do it the other way around. What is the reason for this?  
**RAN HWANG:** Before attending a MFA programme in Seoul, I had enrolled in what we call in Korea a 'paper programme' involving mostly thread, fabric, paper cutouts, and various small things. I finished school and all my training in Korea, and became a painter. While being a painter, I also taught painting to high school and middle school students, explaining art works to them. As for myself, I nevertheless felt I wanted to pursue my studies further, but this time in contemporary art. Up until then, I was a traditional realist painter, which is specifically what I had been trained in. However, I had this urge to find out more in terms of contemporary art, like installation, video, mixed media, etc, so I went to New York in 1997. Unfortunately, the MFA programme I enrolled in was mostly a studio programme, which I had already completed in Korea and which had led me to do three solo shows in Seoul. In order to study all the different media like printmaking, sculpture, computer art, etc., I decided to opt for the BFA programme, when I reached New York.

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## news in brief

## ENCOUNTER: THE ROYAL ACADEMY IN THE MIDDLE EAST, DOHA

On 6 December, the Royal Academy of Arts and Katara, the Cultural Village are presenting *Encounter: The Royal Academy in the Middle East*, an exhibition featuring over 80 works of art in a wide variety of media by 25 Royal Academicians and 25 prominent artists from across the Middle East.

The aim of Encounter is to provide a platform for dialogue amongst practitioners working in a wide range of media – painting, sculpture, assemblage, photography and video – and for an international team of curators to exchange ideas about different communities and environments and how this translates into visual art experience.

Abdulrahman Al-Khulaifi, President of Katara commented: 'We are pleased that Katara was able to co-curate this exhibition with the Royal Academy of Arts to bring this exhibition to Katara. The exhibition is a fine example of the emerging talents from the Middle East which we feel will support the growth of the rising art scene in Qatar'.

## FUGITIVE STRUCTURES SYDNEY

Mid-career Australian architect, Andrew Burns has been announced as winning architect for *Fugitive Structures*, a new Australian annual pavilion type architectural project. *Fugitive Structures* is an invitation-only competition with architects

asked to design a temporary pavilion in an urban setting. The structure will be built in the Sydney's Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation's Zen Garden. Burns attracted great attention earlier this year with his design of Australia House, a mini gallery, studio and atelier in the 'snow country' of Niigata Prefecture, approximately three hours north of Tokyo.

*Fugitive Structures* marks a distinct and new departure for SCAF which since becoming a foundation in 2008 has run 15 exhibition projects with work from the like of Ai Weiwei, Jitish Kallat, Brook Andrew and Japanese design legend, Tokujin Yoshioka. The inaugural *Fugitive Structures* opens to the public in Sydney on Friday 22 March 2013.

## MFA, HOUSTON

Gary Tinterow, director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and Sheikha Hussah Sabah al-Salem al-Sabah, director of the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah (DAI), Kuwait, and co-owner with Sheikh Nasser Sabah al-Ahmed al-Sabah of The al-Sabah Collection, have jointly announced the signing of an agreement of cooperation between their two institutions.

The privately held al-Sabah Collection, one of the greatest collections of Islamic art in the world, will place some 60 objects, ranging from carpets, ceilings and architectural fragments to exquisite ceramics, metalwork, jewellery, scientific instruments and manuscripts, on long-term loan in a

dedicated gallery at the MFAH. The Museum will reciprocate with staff exchanges and training and, at a future date, exchange of works of art and exhibitions. The initial term of the renewable agreement is five years, and the first display is expected to be on view for at least one year, beginning January 26, 2013. This display, which contains objects from the 8th to the 18th centuries, made in the Iberian Peninsula, North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia, will demonstrate the development of new aesthetics in Islamic visual culture, based on calligraphy, geometric ornamentation and the arabesque.

## COURTAULD INSTITUTE, LONDON

The Courtauld Institute of Art has announced that AkzoNobel, the paint and coatings company, are funding three postgraduate students undertaking either a PhD or MA in Conservation of Wall Painting from October 2012. This new initiative builds on AkzoNobel's current commitment to fund Sanjay Dhar, who is studying part-time for his PhD from 2009-2017. All three additional AkzoNobel Scholarships are for students from India, China and Brazil.

The Courtauld's renowned Conservation of Wall Painting Department, under the direction of Professor David Park and Sharon Cather, is the only specialist postgraduate qualification in Wall Painting Conservation in the entire English-speaking world, and takes up

to eight MA students every three years.

## KOLLER AUCTIONS, ZURICH

Koller Auctions concluded its two days of Asian Art auctions on 31 October with a combined total of CHF 7.5 million with Chinese art accounting for the lion's share of the market. Highlights included a gilt figure of the Buddhist goddess Pancaraksha inlaid with stones, height 32 cm, from the 14/15th century, which sold to a Chinese telephone bidder for CHF 3.24 million – one of the highest results worldwide for a comparable Tibetan figure.

## SWANN'S GALLERIES, NEW YORK

On 6 December, the Maps & Atlases, Natural History & Historical Prints, Ephemera sale includes nearly 150 lots from The collection of Dr. Stephen and Michiko Levine of River Edge, NJ. The Levines have assembled one of the largest collections of European and Western printed Japan-related maps in private hands. Amassed over a 40-year period, the collection represents the history of Japan as seen through Western eyes, and also includes important maps of Japanese origin. In addition to maps of Japan proper, this vast collection also contains mappings of Asia and the Pacific showing Japan in numerous and sometimes bizarre configurations. More information on [www.swanngalleries.com](http://www.swanngalleries.com).



## 4 Profile

**AAN:** You mentioned three solo shows in Korea. What was your work like then as opposed to now?

**RH:** Fifteen years ago, I was a realist painter, and a completely different artist. Once I came to New York, my work really started developing in many different ways. I can now say that I have a long experience in mixed media, having tried installations, including wall installations, more than 10 years ago.

**AAN:** Were there any options for you to become more exposed to contemporary art in Korea?

**RH:** The reason for going to the US in my mid thirties was not merely to further my technical skills, but also to have a chance to experience a different environment, to experience a different way of living and to experience all different aspects of art. It was about changing my environment all together, all the more so as I had been living in Korea for more than 30 years. Of course, after 30 years, the traditional moral values I grew up with in Korea are still deeply rooted in my personality, helping to build the fundamental philosophy behind my work. Living in New York for 15 years has matured my practice in different ways and led me to explore new media. One of the biggest advantages of living in New York was being able to see all the various types of international artists and works gathered in one place, not just in galleries or museums, but also just from people in the streets or on the flea markets. New York gave me the courage to attempt bigger things. It was like a huge ball of energy giving me ideas for new methods of expression.

**AAN:** Did you feel limitations within your painting, especially as you had this desire to experience new methods. What made you dissatisfied with the medium of painting?

**RH:** As a painter in Korea, I felt it was difficult to express my own personal identity in a unique and individual way simply because I found it was hard to get away from physically painting itself. For example, one of my recurring themes deals with my Buddhist upbringing and the images of temples. These things build the fundamental philosophies behind the work, and it is challenging to express it with painting. Today, I have changed my approach, and instead of the brush, I am now using the hammer. Of course, there is a certain continuity between my previous paintings and what I am doing now. Take the way I create colour, for example, I make each of the colours of the buttons myself, which is similar to the way I made colours as a painter. Presently, I have the choice to make the colour myself and bring it to a factory where they colour each button. The things I studied in painting still influence the way I make my work today, but it is simply a different method of expression.

**AAN:** Between the brush and the hammer, there was probably an intermediary step. Was it a long transition?

**RH:** Although I was a realist painter in Korea, I had also studied mixed-media art, which was related to the paper programme I mentioned earlier. Before 2003, I made cutouts with mixed media, collage type of boxes, and that specific training may have led me to using the buttons I am including in my work today. Actually, my relying on buttons happened by coincidence. After graduating in New York, I needed a job to support myself



Two love Tree (2012) buttons, beads, and pins on wood panel (2 panels), 110 x 210 cm



Rest II (2009) buttons, beads, pins on wood panel, 275 x 153 cm

as an artist. I ended up working at a fashion embroidery company right before 9/11. On the premises, I saw a lot of buttons from previous years that had not been sold. I asked my boss whether I could use them, and she simply gave them to me. I brought boxes and boxes of buttons back to my studio using them in my artwork. I developed a technique using the buttons in my work relying on pins. That was also the first time I completed a Buddha entirely made of white buttons with pins, using a hammer to plant them. After 9/11, I was shocked by what I had seen on television, and I thought a lot about the human being with so many people dead, falling down from the window. This event led me to another idea as to my work: to create a white Buddha. While in New York, I forgot about my religion, which is strange considering that as a child, I went to temples every day of the week together with my parents. After 9/11, I somehow thought a lot about Buddha, and completed a Buddha wall-installation. Subsequently, many Buddhas followed in my work.

**AAN:** Is it deliberate that the work disintegrates over time? Should your work follow a life-cycle?

**RH:** Most of what I work with now comes from my experience of witnessing 9/11, and how the respectability of human life was lost during that time. My work deals with things that are short lived, passionate and not just with death, but also with rebirth and the entire cycle of human life. 9/11 also got me to think about the changing, the unstable nature of power and authority, how these concepts are not absolute, but in a way get 'recycled'. The entity holding the power always changes.

**AAN:** The technique looks so perfect! You devised a system with a pin holding the button, placing a paillette underneath.

**RH:** I am using beads in the button to make sure they are stable. Following my work on a wall-installation 10 years ago, I developed an excellent technique. The technique may vary with beads behind the nails, or with the angle of the nails holding the buttons down.

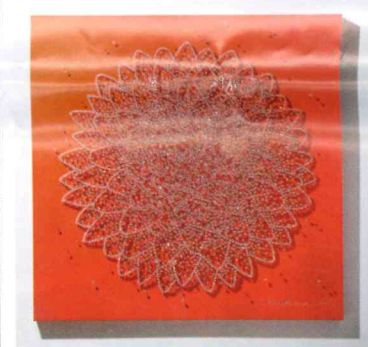
**AAN:** When the panel is blank, do you draw the overall shapes on it or do you rely on the computer or on a projector?

**RH:** Over the years, I have tried out various options. Initially, I used to draw in the work myself. Later, I decided to use a small size drawing, relying on the projector to magnify it. Now I draw, then I put it on my panel through a computer programme, and then put in the nails. Once it is completed, I remove the paper.

The computer has presently become a very important tool because through the computer, I know where to position the pins. Also, the computer is very helpful as in my work there are more and more details. As the colours are different, and the size of the buttons varies considerably, there are many details to keep track of. In addition, the selection of my buttons has become more sophisticated as I am now also using



Unknown UT (2009) threads, pins on wood panel, 240 x 180 cm



Flower in Desert (2009), buttons, beads, pins on wood panel, 105 x 105 cm

custom made paper buttons with five different layers.

**AAN:** What are the main challenges of this particular medium?

**RH:** I would like to use many different kinds of buttons from plastic buttons to mirror buttons to paper buttons or crystal buttons. I would even be tempted to try fabric buttons, just any kind of buttons. I am trying to do all possible things, and I guess there is no limit as to the material of the buttons.

**AAN:** One word which comes up on a regular basis in relation to your work is 'contemplation'. Do you

agree with it, and is it something that you are aiming at when completing the work?

**RH:** At the age of thirty one, I was facing the most difficult time of my life, and I felt I was at the crossroads of life and death. I went deep into the woods to a Buddhist temple in order to live with the monks, practising Buddhism by meditating and praying. Every morning, and three times during the night, the monk would hit me as a signal for praying and for discipline. In a way, it felt as if he would wake up my conscious. The act of hammering that I am using in my work is almost equivalent to the monk's act of hitting me. Whenever I work with the hammer in my hand, it is similar to an act of meditation. By hammering, I think about the restraint and also the freedom that occurs during meditation. There is also the restraint of the pin stopping the button from moving, because I never use any glue. That explains why I prefer to hammer onto a wood panel. That makes my work very strong, almost permanent as opposed to glue.

**AAN:** There seem to be two major events that have affected your artwork: your personal life and 9/11. Did these two episodes affect your outlook towards life and your approach towards art?

**RH:** Although these were two very different events, they carry the same meaning for me because basically, it is about human life. While staying in the temple, I was thinking only about myself. On the contrary with 9/11, I did not think about myself, but about all these people. However, the issues are the same: the human being, the cycle of life, dying, etc.

**AAN:** How did thread come into your work? When did you start using it?

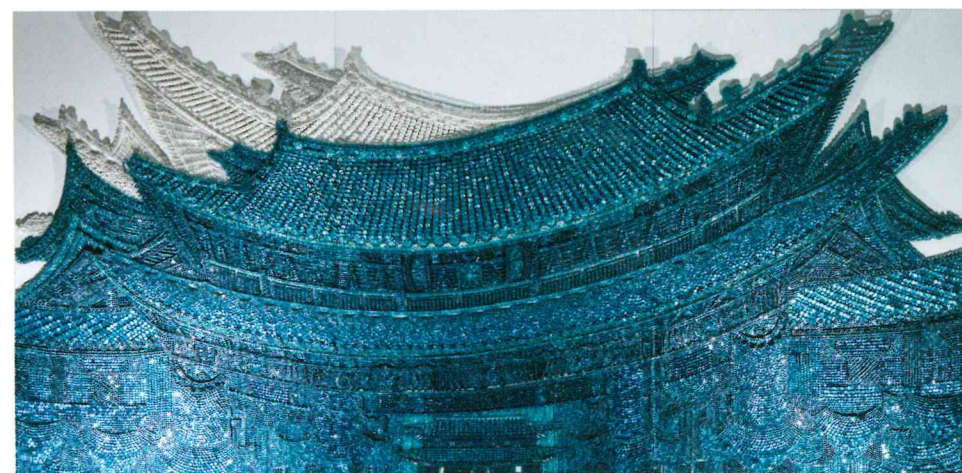
**RH:** I have always been very interested in all kinds of fashion materials. When I was little, I drew Barbie dolls, and everybody loved my drawings. Originally, I wanted to go to fashion school instead of art school. However, I ended up loving painting more than fashion. As I mentioned, after graduating in New York, I got a job in a fashion embroidery company. Every day, I saw nothing but embroidery. In my installations, I use similar materials to the embroidery company, but in a different way.

**AAN:** How would you say that your work has evolved over the past 15 years?

**RH:** Being in New York was a fabulous opportunity to bring together my experience of diverse cultures combined with my upbringing in Korea. That led me towards installation, video, and all these different methods of expression that I would not have been able to explore in Korea be this with painting, installation, sculpture, print, or video.

**AAN:** The pieces depicting Buddha have been shown in New York and Korea. Has there been a different reception or understanding of it in both places?

**RH:** Korea has both, a Christian and a Buddhist community. For some reason, the Christian community hated the Buddhas. They did not see it as art, but simply saw the Buddha figure as a spiritual figure. Korea has a very special culture. Europeans and Americans however see my Buddhas as a work of art, as an icon, and see the meditative aspect of it. Koreans only see the religious aspects of my Buddhas.



East Wind (2012), buttons, beads, pins on wood panel, 180 x 360 cm