



For six weeks in the summer of 2007, hundreds of thousands of people queued up to see a show at the Hong Kong Museum of Art. Tickets for the exhibition were snapped up the moment they went on sale. That year, the museum achieved record attendances of 622,000. However, this should not be taken as a sign of Hong Kong's passion for art.

In fact, the reason for the attendance figures was because the sell-out exhibition included the famed handscroll "Along the River During Qingming Festival", a national treasure. The following year, attendances dropped to 295,000.

For Hong Kong to be an arts hub, there needs to be an audience for the arts. Artist and curator Choi Yanchi, who used to teach at the Visual Arts Academy at Hong Kong Baptist University, says there is a wide range of art to be seen in Hong Kong, beyond the blockbuster shows. However, Choi says most Hong Kong people are not familiar with these other forms of art, "This shows that Hong Kong people are not cultured," she says.

by Phoebe Man and Crystal Chui

Still, Choi who is the Vice-Chair of 1a Space, an independent, non-profit visual arts group, says the atmosphere for art in Hong Kong has improved in recent years because of spaces like the Cattle Depot and the Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre.

children have art during the education the not, they will idea that art art life," he says.

However, Choi stresses the improvement does not necessarily

bring a satisfactory pool of educated audiences to appreciate art. She says the lack of an educated audience threatens the survival of art and cultural exhibitions and publications in Hong Kong. Choi believes that if people are interested in art and culture, they would be willing to pay for it. Unfortunately that is not the case in Hong Kong.

"... it is okay to let our children study art in the new senior secondary schools and to go on to study art in university. It's okay. In fact, it's more than okay. It's good!"

In order to boost Hong Kong's environment for art, Harold Mok Karleung, the chair of the Department of Fine Arts at The Chinese University of Hong Kong and a government advisor on museums, says there should be greater promotion of the arts through different channels of the media. Professor Mok wants to see more art related topics covered in the mainstream and popular media, such as on television.

However, Professor Mok also believes the key to success is to start with art education from a young age. "If children have the chance to experience art during their primary and secondary education then, whether they like it or not, they will at least get used to the idea that art can be a part of normal life," he says.

Mok points out that the recently introduced New Senior Secondary

Curriculum places more emphasis on art appreciation and criticism than the previous curriculum did.

Apart from a greater emphasis on art in regular schools, there are now more schools focused on the arts. HKICC Lee Shau Kee School of Creativity (HKSC) is a senior secondary school which uses art and more flexible teaching methods to enhance young people's diverse potential. It was established four years ago when those in the cultural and creative industry realised there was a need to train new blood for the industry. They also wanted to offer an alternative for students who are interested in the humanities, art and design.

Apart from core subjects like those in regular schools, HKSC students have to attend at least three hours and twenty minutes of visual arts lessons and five hours of creative profession-oriented programmes a week.

However, even students here cannot escape from the pressure of public examinations. Any creativity related projects are temporarily put aside in the lead up to public examinations, as students are then expected to focus on their academic study.



Harold Mok Ka-leung believes the key to success is to start with art education from a young age.







(Left and right) Art work done by students around the campus of HKSC.

Artistic students who want to pursue study in the arts at a higher level still have to clear the obstacle of public examinations as the Hong Kong education system only rewards those with good grades. Eno Yim Wai-ying, the assistant principal of HKSC, says she has seen many talented students who have failed to advance because of the exam-oriented system.

To help such students, HKSC launched a "Little Cattle Depot" trial scheme in 2008. With their parents' consent, students who join the scheme do not take any public examinations. Instead, they devote their time to developing their artistic skills, interests and talents.

or profession are still rare in Hong Kong, compared with Japan and Taiwan. Yim says the Hong Kong education system has never encouraged students to choose a path related to their interests. Students only follow the norm and rarely get to think about what they really want to pursue.

So, it is not surprising that in 2010, less than six per cent of students took the Visual Arts HKCEE and less than one per cent took it at Advanced Level.

Terrence Quong, the principal of Jockey Club Ti-I College (Ti-I), a government aided visual arts and sports secondary school, says the reason for this is that Hong Kong students and, more importantly their parents, do not "dare to art".

What Quong means by "dare to art" is that families dare not let their children study the subject. "I want to tell families that it is okay to let your children study art in the new senior secondary schools and to go on to study art in university. It's okay. In Schools that specialise in a given field fact, it's more than okay. It's good!"

> Quong thinks parents do not want their children to become artists or do art related work because they think it will be hard for them to make a living compared with other professions. These views have affected schools' willingness to offer art classes.

"Our role is not to produce alumni who have careers in art but to help generate an educated population, that is Hong Kong citizens who love art, who appreciate art and know what art is," says Quong.

According to a survey of 453 local secondary schools carried out by the Education Bureau in 2009, 345 schools said they would offer visual arts as one of their subjects under the new curriculum.

But Quong points out that although the schools are willing to offer visual arts, it does not necessarily mean they will end up teaching it. It all depends on the number of students who choose the subject; if there is not enough uptake, the school might decide not to teach it.

Even when parents do send their children to specialist arts schools, it is not a sure indication that they have "dared to art". Chan Huan, a graduate from HKSC is luckier than many of his peers. His parents were prepared



Student exhibitions in Ti-I College.



The campus of HKICC Lee Shau Kee School of Creativity (HKSC) is designed by the world-renowned architect, Rocco Yim. Please see P. 4 for an exclusive interview with Yim.

" ... to understand art is not easy."

to pay the relatively high tuition fees Council for Accreditation of Academic to send him to the school, and now he is studying on a film course at the Federation of Hong Kong Filmmakers.

school could choose to waste their time away due to the laissez-faire policy of the school. According to Chan, many students entered the school because they were unable to get promoted to form four in their and colleges. The government also plays own schools. Some of them may admire the spontaneity of the School of Creativity but very few of them actually entered it for the love of art.

For those students who do have a genuine interest and are able to pursue it further, Hong Kong has a growing number of post-secondary art and design institutes, including two activities there acknowledge that their newcomers to the scene.

Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) and Hong Kong Design Institute (HKDI) began teaching their first students this September. SCAD is understand art is not easy." a respected art and design university in the United States. Its Hong Kong branch, which offers undergraduate and master's degrees, is the only university in Hong Kong exclusively focused on art and design.

HKDI is a design education institute under the government's Vocational Training Council that offers diploma and top-up degree programmes.

These two new institutions join the existing Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts and the Hong Kong Art School as tertiary education institutes providing education and training in fine arts, design and performance arts. Most of the programmes offered by these last three institutions are officially recognised by the Hong Kong

and Vocational Qualifications.

But as Ti-I principal Terence Quong points out, the purpose of art education He says the students at his former is not just to produce artists and professionals but also, "Hong Kong citizens who love art, appreciate art and know what art is."

> This is not just the work of the schools an important role in art education. In 2000, it established the Hong Kong Visual Arts Centre. The centre provides well-equipped studios for sculptors, printmakers and ceramics artists and helps them to hold exhibitions, workshops, demonstrations and other activities.

However, even those who run the existence does not necessarily mean there are more educated audiences out there. As Lesley Lau Fung-ha, the centre's chief curator, says, "It is not difficult to hold art exhibitions, but to

Lau says members of the public frequently ask whether taxpayers' money should be used to solve society's problems rather than used to promote art through ventures like the HKVAC.

"It's sending out a negative message, which is to say we should only satisfy the most basic requirements in society, that



Tang Hoi-chiu, the Chief Curator of the HKMA.



Terence Quong, principal of Ti-I encourages students and parents to "Dare

is to say art is of lesser importance," says Lau. For him, and others who are striving to create a local audience for an Asian arts hub, it is a demoralising message.



Hong Kong Museum of Art (HKMA)

10 Salisbury Road, Tsim Sha Tsui, Hong

Opening hours:

Daily 10:00 am to 6:00 pm

Saturdays 10:00 am to 8:00 pm

Closed on Thursdays (except public holidays)

Hong Kong Visusal Arts Centre (HKVAC)

7A Kennedy Road, Central, Hong Kong

Opening Hours:

Daily 10:00 am to 9:00 pm

Closed on Tuesdays

Artist Studios: 2:00 pm to 5:00 pm, 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm

SCAD Gallery

2/F, 30-32 Wyndham St., Central, Hong

Opening Hours:

Monday to Saturday 10:30 am to 7:30 pm

Varsity NOV 2010 ISSUE 117 NOV 2010 ISSUE 117 | Varsity