

Yasuharu Ishikawa

Founder, Okayama Art Summit, Japan, 2016

“Acceptance of diversity is a wonderful aspect of art,” says Yasuharu Ishikawa, a business man and collector, known in Japan as a next-gen Yusaku Maezawa (now famous for his record-breaking Basquiat auction grab), who has channelled funds from his fashion manufacturing empire into actively creating opportunities for both Japanese and global artists to engage with his hometown of Okayama. In October 2016, Ishikawa devised an exhibition-style art summit, with Liam Gillick as artistic director who weaved together reflective video works by Yu Araki and Anton Vidokle with public displays from Ryan Gander and Lawrence Weiner. Ishikawa has plans to display his collection in a permanent public museum. “Even if showing works generated new, unpredictable reactions in an audience, I am satisfied with that in terms of activating people’s imagination,” he says, “I consider that is one role of my collection.”

something and the process of it. That’s where art becomes the territory of the exchange of ideas and people get to know each other through this wonderful object of thinking.”

Is this new flexible way of patronizing the arts something of an under-40s thing? In some ways, it is. It’s not simply chatter – millennials do things differently than their post-war parents. Experience and narratives, not objects and permanence, guide the generational divide. Even younger heirs to world-coveted art collections have branched off from their parents’ example. Max Levai, son of Marlborough Gallery owner Pierre Levai, has taken up Anne Neukamp, Davina Semo and Betty Tompkins and minted his spaces for Marlborough Contemporary. Tiffany Zabudowicz, whose family’s collection is a crown jewel of London, has been flexing her muscles in New York by throwing pop-up exhibitions (one even in an occupied Times Square office unit). Lu Xun, son of a Chinese industrial magnate, turned the grounds of his Steven Holl-designed Sifang Museum into a leisure complex to attract even more visitors to their Chinese contemporary-heavy holdings.

On the other hand, Adrian Cheng’s K11 Art Foundation (KAF) is a shapeshifter in itself, being neither a gallery nor a museum, and with no representation of artists. This year KAF partnered with MoMA PS1 on the exhibition in Hong Kong titled ‘.com/.cn’ with work by both Chinese and Western artists. KAF also helped fund a site-specific installation (replete with neon tigers) from the ever-imaginative Adrian Wong. It even runs an art village with studios and residencies. “With the K11 Art Foundation we want to create the environment or context where artists are able to create work freely. For me it is very important that everything we do is sustainable and has a lasting impact on the careers of the Chinese artists we work with,” says Cheng, who, at 36, is also the general manager of New World Development, founded by his billionaire grandfather. Cheng instituted a lucrative idea of how to grow arts engagement in China by putting art spaces inside his K11 Malls in Shanghai

and Hong Kong. But KAF is far from a cheap commercial ploy. “Our work encompasses the organization of exhibitions, funding academic research, and creating a residency programme in Wuhan where our K11 Art Village is re-launching this November,” explains Cheng, “Rather than doing one-off projects with the museum partners, artists and curators we work with, we focus on longer-term partnerships, which can grow and develop in collaboration,” adds Cheng.

It’s a cliché, but it remains true that growth takes time. “Everything is so fast these days because of social media and art fairs. People are bombarded with too many things,” says David Totah, whose year-old space TOTAH is on New York’s Lower East Side. “I never thought the world needed another gallery,” he says, “[but] it’s engaging with art again. It’s a community of everyone chipping in to feed certain values and make them succeed through the artists, collectors, curators, and writers... to prevail over certain models that have prevailed for so long.” Totah himself, however, comes from a European line of Old Master dealers and is well aware of how to play the market. However, “my name has to do with accountability,” he says, “I don’t look at things from a top-down standpoint.” Mounting shows of overlooked Light and Space artist Helen Pashgian, or avant-garde architect and artist Lauretta Vinciarelli (whose career was eclipsed by her affair with Donald Judd), or Aleksandar Duravcevic’s totems of trauma, Totah sees his space as an “integration of polarities”, for “art is not something that can be put in a rigid structure. The best plan is not have any plan”.

While perhaps this turn to the authentic is a change in the role of more traditional, established culture capitals in other parts of the world, some gallerists play more of the role of a patron than a dealer. Marwan Zakhem in Accra, for example, set up Gallery 1957 “to support the younger generation of artists in Ghana by providing them with an infrastructure to support career growth, to showcase their talent internationally, without having to leave Ghana”

– thus galvanising the flourishing art scene in the country, he says. “Perhaps I’m indicative of the changing face of patronage,” he muses. Ghana’s art scene, while relatively known outside West Africa (not just as El Anatsui’s birthplace), “is truly unique and offers an astounding amount of peer-to-peer support,” explains Zakhem, despite a landscape with no funding support from the government and collectors few and far between. In addition to putting artists such as Jeremiah Quarshie, Zohra Opoku and Gerald Chukwuma in front of organizations like Sotheby’s, Ikon, Tate, Documenta and the Harn Museum of Art, in Florida, and selling works to public and private museum collections, Zakhem points to residencies as a deeper exchange in this international conversation. “The artists we work with at Gallery 1957 are so engaged in the social and political issues that face the community in Ghana that it would be a great disservice to everyone – locally and internationally – to remove them from this base,” he says. “What they are doing here could incite great change and we don’t want to lose them.”

An artist residency, after all, is a place for exploration, but also for cultural exchange. Part of Garcia’s plans to expand the efforts of The Mistake Room is through a curator-residency programme. Indeed, Toomer left Pulse after turning the fair into a platform of discovery as well as acquisition to start the Stoneleaf residency, where she has created an “intimate environment in which artists and creatives could connect, eat and share,” as she describes it. “We are living through an incredibly challenging moment in time and I want to take a step back from the commercial aspect of the art industry and refocus my efforts solely on artists.” Toomer’s words are echoed by many younger patrons who reject convention, not for rebellion, but by seeing tenable models for the future. It’s not so much what patrons are doing, which is supporting artists (still often through buying their work), but how – through different processes, with sustainability and cultural exchange in mind. ♦♦

