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AN INTERVIEW WITH PEARL LAM OF PEARL LAM GALLERIES

Aug. 22, 2016 by Yunyi Lau [\(/artzine/authors/yunyi/\)](/artzine/authors/yunyi/)



Name: Pearl Lam

Title: Founder, Pearl Lam Galleries

Artists represented:

Antony Micallef, Ben Quilty, Carlos Rolón/Dzine, Chun Kwang Young, Dale Frank, Enrico Marone Cinzano, **Gatot Pujiarto** (<https://theartling.com/artists/gatot-pujiarto/>), **Golnaz Fathi** (<https://theartling.com/artists/golnaz-fathi/>), **Gonkar Gyatso** (<https://theartling.com/artists/gonkar-gyatso/>), Jason Martin, Jenny Holzer, Jiang Dahai, John Young, Kour Pour, Leonardo Drew, Li Tianbing, Morgan Wong, Peter Peri, Pino Pinelli, Qian Jiahua, Qin Yufen, Qiu Deshu, Ren Ri, Su Dong Ping, Su Xiaobai, Suki Seokyeong Kang, Yang Yongliang, Yinka Shonibare MBE, **Zhang Jianjun** (<https://theartling.com/artists/zhang-jian-jun/>), Zhu Jinshi

Upcoming exhibition/s:

SHANGHAI: Looping on Thin Ice – Inci Eviner solo exhibition

HK PEDDER: 1923-1994 - Colour in Space – Sam Francis solo exhibition

HK SOHO: Sinta Tantra: Flatland - A Romance of Many Dimensions – Sinta Tantra solo exhibition

SINGAPORE: PLUGGED – Andy Dewantoro, Aditya Novali, Yudi Sulistyoyo group exhibition



*An installation view of 'Raw Intent' by Anthony Micallef, a recently passed exhibition at Pearl Lam Galleries, Hong Kong
Image courtesy of the artist and Pearl Lam Galleries*

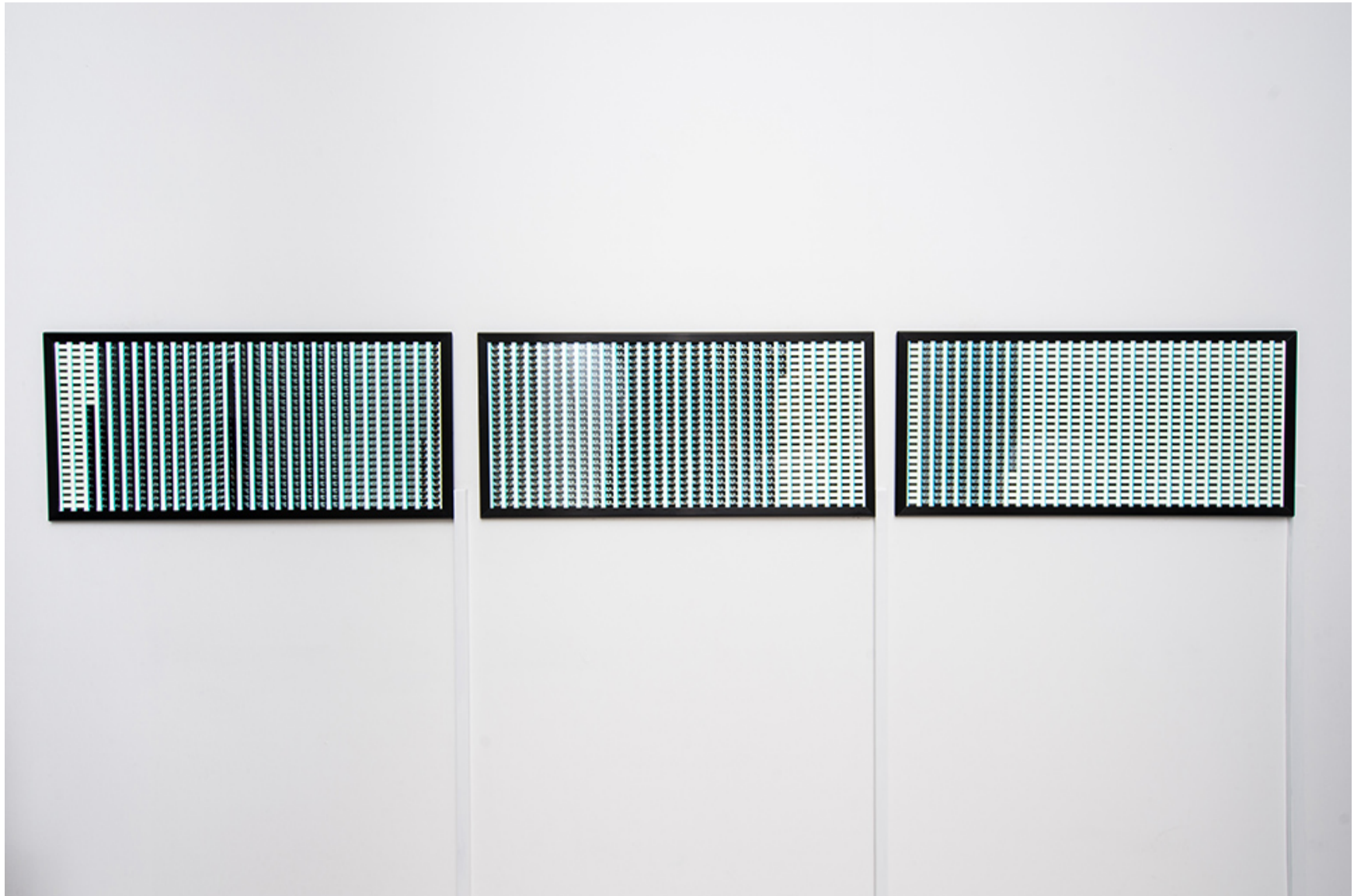
A typical day for me is...

I wouldn't say any day is typical, but a lot of my time typically involves extensive travelling.

We started with a gallery space in Shanghai, but now we have two additional spaces in Hong Kong, and a further space in Singapore. Obviously this in itself sees me travelling a lot within Asia to spend time within these markets. It's also hugely important that I travel internationally, to art fairs, biennials, foundations, museums and art galleries. Not only does this allow me to establish crucial relationships with artists, collectors, critics, curators and dealers, but it also allows me to keep my finger on the pulse of what is current and relevant in the art world and in terms of the market. It's this that enables me to develop my vision and strategy for the Galleries.

My advice for someone who wants to start collecting art is...

Learn, read, travel and gain as much knowledge as you possibly can so you can make informed decisions. However, in the end, buy what you like and —what moves you. It's my personal belief that it's always important to remain curious, and I'm drawn to art that stimulates me to want to learn more about something.



(<https://theartling.com/gold/artists/boo-junfeng/90-seconds/>)

"90 Seconds" (2016) by Boo Junfeng (<https://theartling.com/gold/artists/boo-junfeng/90-seconds/>)

35mm Film on Three Lightboxes / 52cm x 333cm ea. / 20.5" x 131.1" ea. / Edition of 5

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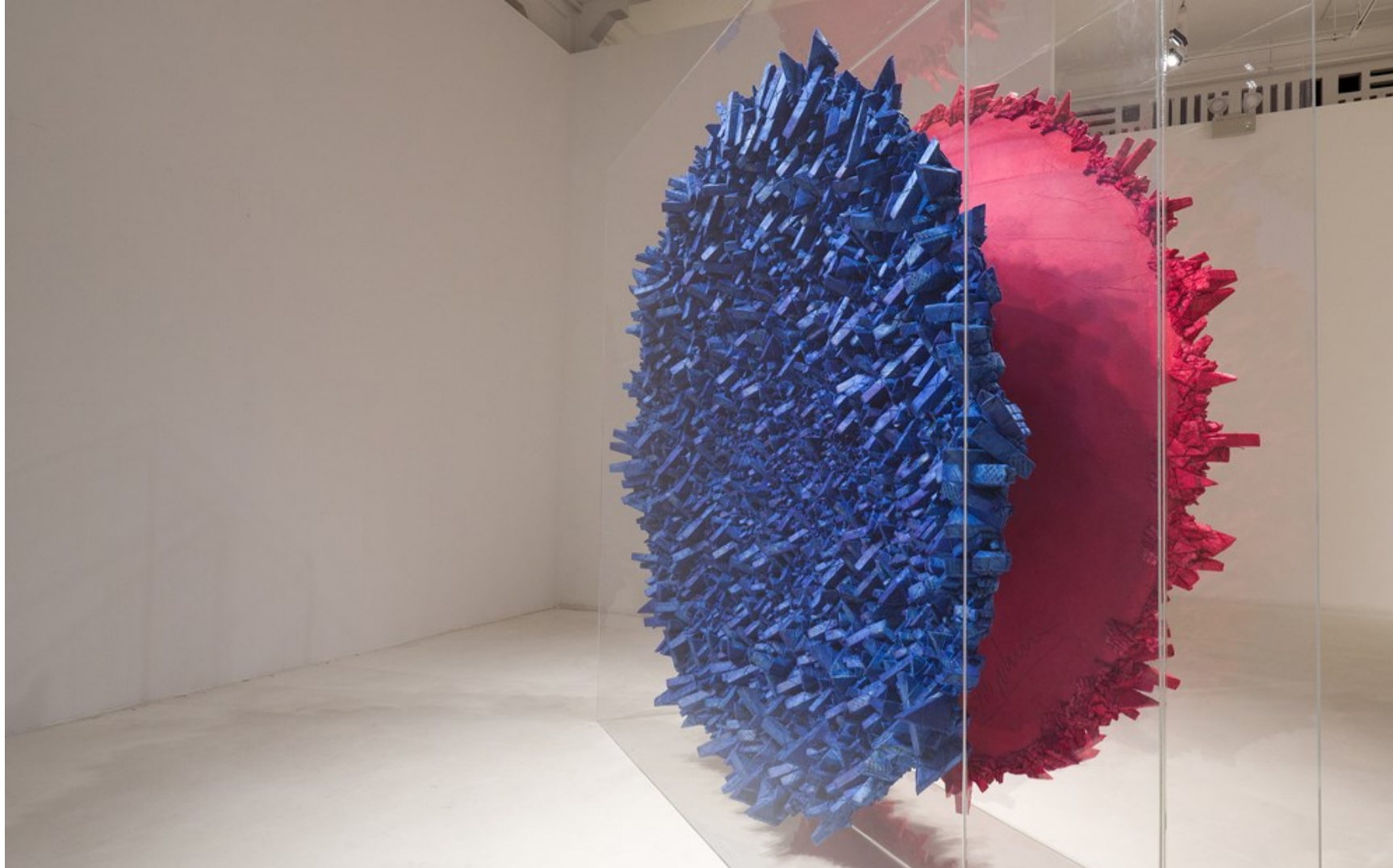
After being educated in the UK, you returned to Hong Kong with the goal of setting up your own gallery. Tell us more about that journey – what was the impetus behind this decision?

Art has always been a passion of mine, something that has set me apart from the rest of my family. It wasn't seen as a suitable career by my parents, so instead they sent me to Shanghai in 1993 to learn about property development.

They had high hopes for me, but after three months in the business, I simply saved up my salary and spent it all in one go at a gallery in Hong Kong. I'd collected two paintings by the Shanghainese artist Sun Liang. These were both the first Chinese works I had collected and the first serious works that I had ever owned. Sun Liang became my friend and introduced me to the art scene in Shanghai, taking me to galleries and artist studios.

In the 1990s, I organised avant-garde pop-up exhibitions in Hong Kong, and in 2003, I was tasked with curating and mounting an exhibition as part of the French Year in China entitled "Awakening: La France Mandarine—The French Influence on Chinese Art", which gave me further access to some Chinese artists who were still not on the international radar. I learned a great deal from these artists and, later, from scholars like Professor Gao Minglu.

This was such an overwhelmingly positive and confirmatory experience for me that soon after I decided to open my first gallery space in Shanghai, and I've never looked back since!



Some of the amazing pieces by Korean artist Chun Kwang Young at his solo exhibition 'Aggregation' at Pearl Lam Galleries, Singapore

Image courtesy of the artist and Pearl Lam Galleries

What is your process for planning your gallery programme? With galleries in Shanghai, Singapore and Hong Kong, how do you decide what sort of shows you set up in each city? What are the differences between each of those art markets from each other?

It can be a complicated process. The three cities where my four galleries are situated are highly metropolitan, and play important roles as hubs in Asia's growing art scene. At the same time you must consider that each has its own distinct identity and wealth of artistic output. Pearl Lam Galleries' mission has always been to promote cross-cultural dialogue; we work with artists over a long period of time and are constantly looking to discover new markets and territories to present their work to new audiences and stimulate debate about the art of different regions and its international interpretation.

We've worked hard to develop a unique gallery model and exhibition programme dedicated to championing artists who re-evaluate and challenge perceptions of cultural practice from their regions. It's important to support local art scenes and present artists' work on the international stage, but at the same time we want to explore the complexity of cultural influences and dialogue between Asia and the West, and encourage international artists and designers to create new work which engages specifically with the region. Having said that, our two Hong Kong spaces are dedicated for established and emerging artists respectively to provide platforms for artists in different career stage.

We have strong collector bases in Mainland China, Hong Kong, Southeast Asia, Europe and the USA, and we have found that differences in collectors arise from confidence and experience in collecting, rather than location. Generally, people start buying art from their own region but as their knowledge expands so does the scope of their art collection. Of course everyone has their own personal preferences and strategy.



[\(https://theartling.com/gold/artists/zhang-jian-jun/flowing-water-16-1/\)](https://theartling.com/gold/artists/zhang-jian-jun/flowing-water-16-1/)

"Flowing Water #16-1" (2016) by Zhang Jian Jun (https://theartling.com/gold/artists/zhang-jian-jun/flowing-water-16-1/)

*Oil, Acrylic, Chinese Ink and Rice Paper on Canvas / 285cm x 160cm / 112.2" x 63.0" / Unique Work
Available on theartling.com!*

In addition to representing artists, you are also a collector yourself. What do you think is your role as a gallery owner, and how does this differentiate from your role as a collector? What are you currently interested in collecting?

As a gallery owner, I provide a platform for artists I believe in to exhibit their works to a wider international audience, and I organise exhibitions that I hope will provoke dialogue between the East and West. In recent years, I have been focusing on educating Western audiences about Chinese abstract art, whose origins greatly differ from Western expressionism.

Asia is often said to have a rapidly growing art market. However, this year there has been much speculation about a slowing global art market. How do you think this will affect Asia and how do you think the art scene here will evolve?

The Asian contemporary art market is on the whole still very young, with the exception of Korea where collectors have been buying since the 1980s. Essentially, the Asian art market is still building a comprehensive infrastructure and developing an art ecology. The growth that has happened has been rapid, and it's extremely exciting to be part of this potential and development.



*"Guang Liang I" (2016) by John Young, one of the artists represented by Pearl Lam Galleries
Image courtesy of the artist and Pearl Lam Galleries*

The art market has changed radically in the last ten to twenty years with large, international art fairs and new technology. How have you and your gallery adapted and what are your future plans?

The rapid growth of internet has really changed the way we look and define contemporary art. The collectors are much more informed about the artists before seeing the physical work. Once they've seen the artwork, I'd say that they tend to make a decision to collect or not more swiftly than ever before.





It can work both ways however – there's a level playing field now of general information, but we're still seeing an absence of archival material available to collectors online. It's important to maintain focus and to develop media literacy in the way we use technology.

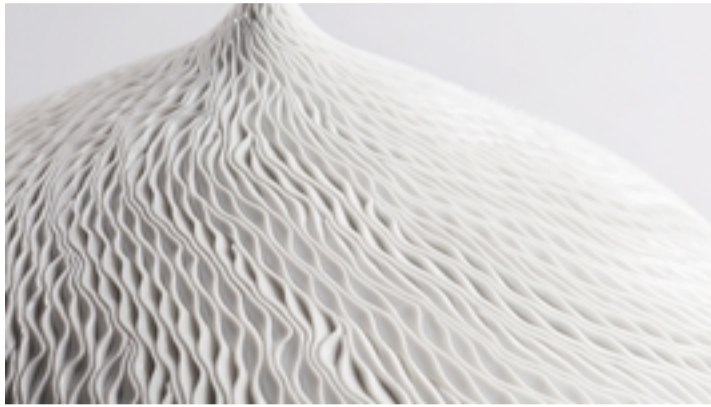
Furthermore, since technology is now such a large part of our everyday lives, it is only natural that there is a growing interest in new media art. Artists have been able to make innovative advancements in working with new media, which has expanded the types of works being shown. Traditionally, museums and other institutions have been the main supporters of new media works, as they have the space for larger installations, including video work and the resources for preservation. However, individual art collectors are now also collecting these types of work. You can't overlook the relevance of new media art in today's culture.

To find out more about Pearl Lam Galleries, click [here \(https://theartling.com/galleries/pearl-lam-galleries/\)](https://theartling.com/galleries/pearl-lam-galleries/).

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