

New collectors shake up art world

Well-educated, confident and wealthy young Chinese buyers are making their mark in contemporary circles

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In China, a growing number of young art collectors are coming to the fore. They not only buy art but also contribute to the contemporary art ecosystem.

The country's market recorded a turnover of \$4.9 billion in 2016, surpassing that of the United States to take the lead globally, according to French database Artprice.

"The young collectors who are frequently reported on by media are only the tip of an iceberg. The group increases in size every year. More join in, influenced by their peers, who love to share their art collections with the public," said Li Yan-feng, a general manager with China Guardian Auctions.

Unlike their predecessors, who would buy Chinese pieces at auction houses and share their purchases within a circle of friends, younger collectors spend more on contemporary pieces at galleries and art fairs, where they can interact with artists and visit more shows.

The younger generation — with many members hailing from wealthy or art families — share a lot in common, said Li. They are usually well-educated, confident about their tastes and open to all mediums and artists, regardless of nationality.

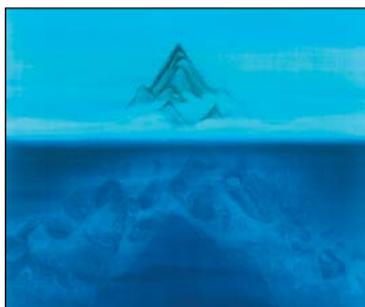
Tong Chi Kar, 36, vice-chairman of high-end property company Tomson Group, said his art collection is a reflection of his passion and love for art. He tries to spend his spare time outside of work in Shanghai visiting galleries, art fairs and museums in China and abroad.

"If I'm on a business trip to cities like London and Paris, I'll definitely visit local art museums. In fact, I have been to these museums many times," said Tong, who runs a private art space, C+, in Shanghai's downtown area along the Huangpu River.

Tong owns more than 200 pieces — mainly abstract works by artists born after the 1970s, including paintings, sculptures, installations and videos. He is interested in the work of artists who grew up in his era, as he can find emotional links in the art and relate to similar experiences.

Pieces by international artists account for nearly one-fifth of Tong's collection. These include big names like Tracey Emin from the United Kingdom and the late Yves Klein from France.

Tong spent his teenage years in the United States and was educated in Boston. He once visited a show in high school featuring Pablo Picasso's paintings from the Spanish master's blue period. The exhibition had such an impact on Tong that his collections largely feature blue.



Huang Yu, cofounder of Art Chengdu. Huang showcased his collection of more than 300 pieces last year in his hometown in Southwest China's Sichuan province.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Young art collectors Ying Qinglan (left) and Tong Chi Kar represent the new generation of Chinese art collectors.



In 2009, Tong's first art purchase was an oil painting by Chinese artist Zhou Chunya. He could not take his eyes off it when he first saw it. "I buy art according to my instincts. Works must touch my heart and move me," he said.

In May, Tong set up Artcare in Beijing to offer art-related services, such as insurance, transportation and storage facilities, as well as consultations and projects to cooperate with artists.

The idea behind Artcare stemmed from his online and offline conversations with collector friends, who made him realize there was a demand for such services.

"It's like services for my own collection," he said.

Tong loves to share his passion for art with his 330,000 followers on his Sina Weibo micro blog. "Art is a lifestyle. It's part of my life and I'd like to share it with others," he said.

Unlike Tong's use of instinct to buy art, Huang Yu, 36, cofounder of international art fair Art Chengdu, adopts a systematic approach. He has definite ideas on what to buy and

has more than 300 pieces, mostly conceptual works and videos.

Last year, Huang held a show of his collection in his hometown, Chengdu, in Southwest China's Sichuan province. This was followed by a forum involving young Chinese collectors. Huang wanted to provide a platform for them to exchange ideas.

Huang was born into a wealthy family. His mother is a successful businesswoman and owns a museum in Chengdu.

In his early 20s, Huang was fascinated with auto racing and became a racer. In 2003, he was hooked on bodybuilding and won a competition. However, these short-term interests soon gave way to his love of art.

In 2003, he founded an auction house in Beijing with his elder brother. For several years, he bought only Chinese antiques just like his parents' generation.

He went to Shanghai's China Minsheng Bank in 2008 and helped launch the first art fund in Asia. His move to the Minsheng Contemporary Art Museum in Shanghai helped

spur his love of contemporary art, leading him to buy about 100 pieces within two years. He also seeks out the work of emerging international artists, mainly for investment.

"I rarely sell pieces from my collections. I separate the investment part clearly from my collections," said Huang.

After years in the field, he said he better understands the development of contemporary Chinese art. He said he buys work by those who possess a critical footprint in art history, such as Yang Fudong, Liu Xiaodong and Ding Yi.

"I hope to conduct a world tour of my own collection, specific to a certain art form, such as video," he said.

Huang devotes half his time to art and the rest to his business, which is involved in the cultural, entertainment and investment sectors. His high-end club in Chengdu displays his collections.

Next year, Huang's Art Chengdu fair will work with 30 galleries worldwide to showcase art that appeals to young people.

"I often feel tired and want to sleep for a day," said Huang. "But I feel my energy return very quickly when I think about art."

Ying Qinglan, 37, is the cofounder of Art021, a popular annual art fair in Shanghai. She is also a celebrity collector of sorts, appearing in lifestyle and fashion magazines.

In August, Ying organized an art award for young Chinese artists, supported by luxury car brand Porsche. "For me, collecting art is actually a humble and private affair," the Shanghai native said, adding that she owns several hundred works.

In 2012, Ying bought a painting by influential Chinese artist Zhang

Enli in Switzerland, inspiring her to collect more.

She frequently attends gallery exhibitions and fairs, and regularly travels overseas for shows.

"Visiting shows is a kind of lifestyle that I share with my friends. We often go together," said Ying. Friends from the fashion and entertainment fields, whom she has influenced to collect art, include celebrity model Xi Mengyao, better known as Ming Xi, who has modeled for lingerie label Victoria's Secret.

Ying loves to meet artists. She even appeared in a work by emerging video artist Cheng Ran. Her experience studying abroad has also fueled her interest in international names.

Ying's mother worked in a government culture department and has many connections with art circles. She also buys artwork, mainly figurative paintings.

"My mother's generation seldom bought works by foreign artists. But we're from the younger generation and go beyond such borders because of our exposure," Ying said.

Her collection is also largely inspired by her collector husband, David Chau, who has a degree in art history. The couple cofounded Art021, and their CC Foundation handles their artwork.

Still, the husband and wife keep their collections separate, reflecting their personal tastes. "I'm independent and try to develop my own style," said Ying.

Apart from art, she runs a beauty center in Shanghai, offering plastic surgery and skin-care services. The center is now cooperating with Tongji University in Shanghai on cell regeneration.

"I'm really happy when I help more people take part in art," she said.