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“We should move even faster”: Hong Kong Collector Patrick Sun on supporting LGBTQ Art and Artists



Portrait of Patrick Sun. Image copyright and courtesy of the artist.

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Patrick Sun, the art collector behind the upcoming Bangkok Art and Cultural Centre exhibition exploring LGBTQ art in Southeast Asia, shares his somber insights and optimistic vision.

TEXT: Reena Devi

IMAGES: Courtesy of Patrick Sun

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(https://www.cobosocial.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Patrick-Sun_2.jpg)

Portrait of Patrick Sun. Image copyright and courtesy of Patrick Sun.

On any given day, Patrick Sun, the Hong Kong collector known for collecting LGBTQ art and supporting the LGBTQ community, is possibly the most cultivated and idealistic person you will meet, standing out amidst the snobbery and cynicism typical of the art world. Georgina Adam writing for Financial Times' (<https://www.ft.com/content/27dfa312-09d1-11e9-a242-6043097d0789>) even described him as "cheerful and, most importantly, optimistic."

Yet during his Skype interview with CoBo Social, for a brief moment, Sun provides a rare glimpse of a man rendered somber while discussing the tragic implications and unbearably high emotional cost we often fail to acknowledge when we talk about the labor of being LGBTQ artists and making art about issues of personal and social concern.

The art collector recalls his encounter with Ren Hang, the famed Chinese photographer known for his nuanced shots of human physicality and sexuality, who suffered from depression and committed suicide jumping off the 28th floor of building in Beijing in 2017. He was only 29 years old.

Sun said, "I met him and had coffee with him in Beijing and he seemed to be a very bubbly, outgoing person but I didn't know he was depressed. Then subsequently, I found out that people who suffer from depression don't show you that side when you see

them. If they are depressed, they stay home, but if they agree to come and have coffee with you, they will make an extra effort to be happy and outgoing. So I could not detect that dark side of him. We wanted to collect his work. We only have some of his work and then one day I heard he jumped down..."

Sun admitted that his “one regret is that we haven’t moved fast enough” in terms of supporting LGBTQ artists, their art and their rights. “While you think you might be moving fast enough, maybe you haven’t moved fast enough. We should move even faster, especially when you talk about gay rights and countries in Asia where gay people are oppressed. We hope these changes come sooner than later,” he said.

It is a sentiment worth noting, coming from an art collector and real estate developer who has moved pretty quickly. Sun started the Sunpride Foundation in 2014, dedicated to embracing and promoting the rich creative history of the LGBTQ community and fostering a “more equitable world for LGBTQ people and their allies. Within the five years since, the Foundation has partnered with two major museums in Asia and Southeast Asia to put on extensive surveys of LGBTQ art from the region, while being boldly open about the theme and focus of their exhibitions.

Opening to the public on 23 November this year, the group exhibition “SPECTROSYNTHESIS II – Exposure of Tolerance: LGBTQ in Southeast Asia (<http://sunpride.hk/sunpride-event-spectrosynthesis-ii/>)” at The Bangkok Art and Culture Centre (BACC) will showcase regional contemporary art by 59 artists exploring lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and queer creative history in Southeast Asia and beyond. “SPECTROSYNTHESIS II” is the second stop of a touring exhibition that made its debut in the Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei in Taiwan in 2017. The show drew an attendance higher than that of MOCA, Taipei’s average footfall per show but organizers declined to reveal actual figures.



(<https://www.cobosocial.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/BACC.jpg>)

Newly-commissioned works by Balbir Krishan.

[Left] Before: Section 377 – Don't Love, Don't Breathe, Don't Live, 2019, Collection of Sunpride Foundation.

[Right] After: Section 377 – Love Equally, Love Freely, Love Proudly, 2019, Collection of Sunpride Foundation. Images courtesy of Sunpride Foundation.

Sun said the increased profile of the exhibition in Taiwan was possibly due to its timeliness as it took place during a time “when Taiwan was considering same sex marriage, so it brought a lot of attention from international media exposure about our show.”

He also felt “SPECTROSYNTHESES – Asian LGBTQ Issues and Art Now (<https://www.cobosocial.com/dossiers/spectrosynthesis-asian-lgbtq/>)” at MOCA, Taipei, contributed to the national discourse in some small way because “having a show at the museum has two advantages. First of all, it's a museum, and people would go there on a regular basis. [While doing so] and seeing a show with LGBTQ themes, they would be more open minded.”

“Secondly,” he said, “the museum has a government endorsement and they would think since this is in a museum, this is the right thing to do and they would become less rejecting. So I think our show helped to make some people accept the gay issue in a more non-confrontational way.”

Sun admitted their Taiwan show did receive some criticism for featuring artists predominantly Chinese in ethnic origin, from Canada, the United States, China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, given that

it is an expansive survey show. His response: it is only the first step of a touring exhibition. In bringing the show to Bangkok, they "obviously have to change it, localize it" and include more diverse artists and art.

With the guidance of upcoming BACC curator Chatvichai Promadhattavedi and his team, the BACC exhibition showcases work by artists such as Balbir Krishan (India), Dinh Q. Lê (Vietnam), David Medalla (Philippines), Ramesh Mario Nithiyendran (Sri Lanka), Arin Rungjang (Thailand), Anne Samat (Malaysia), Jakkai Siributr (Thailand), Hui-Yu Su (Taiwan), Danh Võ (Vietnam) and Lyno Vuth (Cambodia).

Highlights include Samat's commissioned work *Rise Of The Phoenix* (2019), the artist's trademark androgynous sculpture with a three-metre-long rainbow-coloured train made of woven materials. The work highlights the artist's preoccupation with the 'ideal form' and her desire for the community to rise from the ashes like a phoenix. Also, Indian artist Krishan, who received backlash and prejudice from his artworks about the gay community, will present two paintings portraying the differences before and after the repeal of section 377 of the Indian penal code that criminalised sex between men.

"I genuinely believe we are heading in the right direction and the right direction is that there will be equal rights for gay people. I believe the world is changing, and everybody will follow in the right direction because you don't want to wake up one day and realise you're on the wrong side of history," Sun said. "So that's where my optimism comes from."

SPECTROSYNTHESIS II – Exposure of Tolerance: LGBTQ in Southeast Asia (<http://sunpride.hk/sunpride-event-spectrosynthesis-ii/>)

23 November, 2019 – 1 March, 2020

Bangkok Art and Culture Centre

Spectrosynthesis II - Sunpride Foundation



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