

# PRESS RELEASE

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10<sup>th</sup> March, 2010

## ***"Haven't You Heard?"***

### **Artists of the 80's Contemporary Arts Group Exhibition**

Curator : Calvin Hui

Date : 11<sup>th</sup> March to 11<sup>th</sup> April, 2010

Opening Date : 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2010

Venue : Contemporary by Angela Li  
G/F, 90-92 Hollywood Road, Central, Hong Kong

Participating Artists: Wong Chun Hei (1986 - , Hong Kong)  
Li Tin Lun Otto (1980 - , Hong Kong)  
Zhou Yilun (1983 - , Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China)  
Xu Di (1982 - , Shenyang, Liaoning, China)  
Gao Mingyan (1983 - , Shanghai, China)  
Ikumi Nagasawa (1980 - , Tokyo, Japan)  
Nam Hyojun (1987 - , Japan/ South Korea)  
Kim Yong Kwan (1980 - , South Korea)  
Robert Zhao Renhui (1983 - , Singapore)  
Joseph de Juras (1980 - , The Philippines)

Types of Work : Mixed Media Installation, Conceptual Photograph, Video, Painting

Time : Monday to Saturday 11am to 7.30pm  
Sunday & Public Holiday 12 noon to 5pm

Website : <http://www.cbal.com.hk>



## **Curator's Foreword**

During the height of the American civil rights movement of the 1960s, Bob Dylan wrote a song for the young people entitled *The Times They Are A-Changin'*:

*Come mothers and fathers throughout the land,  
And don't criticize what you can't understand,  
Your sons and your daughters are beyond your command,  
Your old road is rapidly agin'.  
Please get out of the new one if you can't lend your hand,  
For the times they are a-changin'.*

Since the 1960s, these "changes" have also quietly played out across Asia. Over the past forty or fifty years, we have seen these changes sweeping from Tiananmen Square to the gates of the Hong Kong Legislative Council, from Manila to Bangkok and on. The second generation to follow the post war baby boom came up with ideas and values that differed markedly from those of their parents. They already know to say "NO" to the greed of the capitalists and the oppression of their governments. They were tired of seeing their traditions being wiped out, and tired of seeing their natural environments and landmarks of collective history being destroyed. Meanwhile, their own "identities" in society are slowly fading...

For a while, because of the protests against the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link, the words "post 80s" became the top search item on Hong Kong search engines. This wave subsided a bit with the Legislative Council's motion to fund the railway project and with the appearance of the so called "post 80s leader" Christina Chan Hau-man on the cover of a local gossip magazine. However, it is important for society to understand the deep meanings behind the term "post 80s".

"Post 80s" is a term from the mainland that originally meant people born between the years 1980 and 1989. That alone is not enough to become a hot social topic, but this generation, merely children a decade ago, have suddenly come of age and become a force in society that cannot be ignored. Much has been said about them, and they seem to stand apart from the generations that preceded them. Under the influence of the media, the term "post 80s" has come to carry negative connotations, meaning someone who is "radical, has no plan, is unable to withstand pressure and is poor at communication". Is that too much of a generalization? Or



should we re-examine the social phenomena related to “post 80s” in various regions to explore this new generation’s relationship and effect on society?

In mainland China, because of strict enforcement of the One-Child Policy, the term “post 80s” is a stand-in for single children. Many of these children, born in the beginning stages of China’s economic reform, enjoyed the sole loving attention of their parents, who were also willing to spend their wealth on their only children, turning them into what scholars see as a “spoiled generation”. But because of the reform and opening of the education system, many people in the post 80s generation are better cultivated than people in previous generations, with their habits, values and worldviews closer in line with the international mainstream. Though most of the western media considers the political and human rights situation in China to be less than ideal, it cannot be denied that the national political system and economic environment are growing increasingly developed. Many people of this generation have used their vision, knowledge and insight to grasp on to opportunities and become part of the new social and economic elite. Though not every member of the post 80s generation has been so successful, many people believe that they will become the core of China’s rising middle class.

The post 80s generation aspires to the freedom of speech in foreign capitalist societies, yearning to use criticism to examine the political system and social inequities. With the rapid development of the internet, they have the courage to make open criticisms in cyberspace, creating pressure on public opinion. When they come across inequities that lack the proper channels for reaction, they use “human search engines” – crowd-sourced search efforts – to rapidly find the culprits in the hope of quickly spreading the awareness of the problem to a regional or even national level and finding justice. Aside from this, when serious disasters happen, such as the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, netizens rapidly organised volunteer teams for the relief effort. This brought the post 80s generation a lot of positive coverage in the media, and society is starting to see them in a different light.

Compared to the mainland, Hong Kong’s idea of the “post 80s generation” arose rather late, but it has more political connotations and a much narrower meaning. From the April 2007 protests against the demolition of the Hong Kong Star Ferry Terminal, to the controversial demonstrations against the high-speed rail link with Mainland China, we have seen the rise of a new generation who support action for local causes and strive to protect Hong Kong’s old landmarks; they stand up to the government and to real estate developers in hopes of arousing respect in society for local history and culture. They wish to protect the colonial



Victorian architecture, and cherish Hong Kong's disappearing collective memory. The general consensus in society is that the term arose in June 2009 with the group of young people involved in the "post 80s cultural memorial of the Tiananmen Square Incident", who called themselves "post 80s" and "spontaneous groupings", and affirmed that though they had not experienced the Tiananmen Square Incident themselves, they dared not to forget it. This series of social incidents has led observers to believe that this marks the break of the post 80s generation's silence. It was the first time they rose up in opposition to the government and other organisations, loudly proclaiming that Hong Kong is their city, and that they are a component of Hong Kong's local culture.

It wasn't until early 2010 that the term "post 80s" became widespread in Hong Kong. At the time, a group of young people in their twenties organised themselves over the internet and made plans to protest for "full elections in 2010" and against the Legislative Council's motion to fund the Hong Kong section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link. This represented the first time that young members of the post 80s generation engaged in widespread political participation and it had a big impact on society. Since the "2010 New Year's Protests", this group of youths has been dubbed a new post 80s political force by the media.

Aside from the politically conscious minority, most of Hong Kong's "post 80s generation" is viewed as a "generation lacking in self-awareness". In Dale Lu's book, *Four Generations of Hong Kongers*, Hong Kong's fourth generation, i.e. the post 80s generation, is one that missed the greatest social opportunities in Hong Kong, and are fated to be a generation of "losers". Surely, Hong Kong's generation was born at the peak of Hong Kong's economic development and at a time of great uncertainty, though no small amount of hope, for society. They entered the ranks of society under the worst economic environment, and a bit of hopelessness is unavoidable. Though their knowledge and contact with the world is far more than that enjoyed by previous generations, and they enjoyed much better education, Hong Kong's universities are filling to the brims and an increasing number of people are getting college degrees. Now a college degree is merely a basic requirement for entering the work force. Every day they are chased by high expenses. Many post 80s people, entering into their thirties, barely have a chance to provide for themselves, and now face an uncertain and daunting future.



The rest of Asia has also faced many problems in their processes of urbanisation: widespread destruction of the environment, old landmarks and old society. Faced with rapid globalisation, the explosive spread of information, the absurdity of everyday life, the threats to human life posed by global warming and pollution and the distortions of society wrought by successive financial tsunamis, members of the post 80s generation must seek themselves out, and seek out their futures in a world that is unbalanced, crisis-ridden and seemingly helpless. Though they received universal education and enjoy more material and social freedoms than preceding generations, they lack social unity and are skeptical about their parents' values such as the importance of historical culture, views on family and the rule of law.

The situation is the same in Korea. The post 80s generation in Korea is called "generation C". As they were growing up, Korea's economy was expanding rapidly. Interest rates were low, the US dollar was cheap and oil was cheap. Like their counterparts in Hong Kong, they enjoyed a carefree childhood but as they were coming of age, drastic changes were taking place in the Asian economic environment. After watching the Asian financial crisis in 1997, they were entering society in the midst of the 2008 global financial crisis. The poor economic environment gave birth, both directly and indirectly, to many social phenomena revolving around generation C.

In the early 1990s, about a third of the university-aged population was going to university, but as generation C reached university age, that number had shot up to 80 percent. Under these circumstances, it would be understandably hard to get ahead with just a college degree. Compounded by the rising rates of unemployment in Korea in recent years, now there are many college educated members of generation C who have a difficult time finding a job, to the point that some, after repeated setbacks, have given up working altogether. They feel that they cannot live up to society's expectations of them and that they have been left behind. This has created a whole "culture of defeat".

Another problem that has gained a lot of attention is the rise of the NEET's (Not in Education, Employment or Training). Because of the massive salary discrepancies between tenured and temporary employees in Korea, some young people, facing low income and a not so bright future, have decided to just stay at home. It is estimated that there are as many as 1.13 million young NEET's in Korea today. As this trend continues, it will lead to increasing family, social and economic problems.



Though people see generation C as a very self-centered group who do not care much for social or political issues, these young people organized a long and massive series of candlelight vigils using the internet to protest the government's decision to lift the ban on importing American beef, which carried the danger of mad cow disease. Not only did the protest involve up to one million people, it also led to a large political movement to force the resignation of Korean president Lee Myung-bak, forcing the government to heed the strong voices of generation C and the internet.

In neighboring Japan, the most well-known topic about the post 80s generation is either the idea of "otaku" or the idea of the "herbivore man". Forget about the otaku, cultural estimates say that up to two thirds of post 80s Japanese men are herbivore men. The term means men who will not actively strive for anything, just like animals who care about nothing but the grass under their feet, but will pay plenty of money for clothes, styling and skin care. Many people believe that the emergence of the herbivore man stems from Japan's long term economic slump. Since growing up, the post 80s generation has never enjoyed the good times they knew as children. In the economic climate, even if they were passionately engaged with their work, they could never hope to earn the same kind of income the previous generation enjoyed, so they instead choose to seek confidence through fashion and other means.

Japan is a nation that emphasizes qualifications and status. Young people have always been a silent group. Youths who should be taking responsibility for the nation, are instead feeling that they are being marginalized by society. They can no longer look forward to the stability of lifetime employment; instead, they will likely have to bear the burden of an increasing national debt. Faced with this predicament, post 80s Japanese are coming to the realization that their only choice is to strive for a better future. As traditional job opportunities grow increasingly scarce, they have started organizing and leading their own NGOs in hopes of concentrating their voice and telling society about their needs and ideas for future development.

Singapore is one of the richest countries in Asia. In the eyes of many, the Lion City is the country with the most civilized, law-abiding and peacefully coexisting citizenry, and is also famous as the "garden city".

In fact, in the few short decades since gaining independence in 1965, Singapore has developed itself into Asia's most important financial, service and transportation centre. During the rapid urbanization process, the natural appearance of Singapore has been constantly



changing. In the eyes of its post 80s generation, all that has taken place around them is testament to their growth, but with recent unprecedented changes in the speed of economic development, everything they know is beginning to disappear.

Post 80s Singaporeans grew up in an environment of endless competition. Their elite-streamed education system has been criticized as relying too much on textbooks, stifling independent thought. Each child must cram to keep up with studies to live up to society's standards of "elites". When this generation hit working age, they hit the worst labor market the country has ever seen, with the post 80s generation making up the largest proportion of the nation's unemployed. A college education no longer guarantees a high-paying job. As competition heats up, some have chosen to leave their homes for other parts of Asia or to developed countries to seek career development, while others have created alternative personal careers on the internet in hopes of finding a new way out.

Also a Southeast Asian nation, the Philippines give people the impression of social unrest, corruption and poverty. Post 80s Filipinos witnessed great changes in their social system as they grew up, spending their childhood under the Marcos dictatorship, witnessing the first Philippine female president, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, and the bloodless coup that opened the first chapter in Philippine democracy. They know of the efforts their elders made for freedom, and they saw everything, knowing deep down that they had the power to create change, to struggle for freedom and human rights.

However, the political situation in the Philippines has never been stable since, and compounded with serious government corruption, the people always must struggle for even a meager existence. Statistics show that fully one third of the Philippine population was born after 1980, but because of rising tuition fees, many people are unable to go to college. Local unemployment rates have always been high, and many young people have turned to drugs and theft to get by. Even those who make it to school are often willing to work abroad as laborers, trying to earn more foreign exchange. Right now, over two thousand Filipinos leave the country each day to seek work in other countries.

Despite all of this, the post 80s Filipinos have never forgotten the lessons of history. They know the value of freedom, and they are ready at all times to fight peacefully for their nation's democracy, natural environment, traditions and culture. They are the hope of the Philippines.



In the process of urbanizing Asia since the 1980s, there have been many drastic changes. These changes and phenomena are not necessarily the same in every city and country across Asia, but one thing is sure, the post 80s generation has grown into a social group that cannot be ignored and must take over the future direction of our societies' development.

I fully believe that the young artists of the post 80s generation will become the leaders of the contemporary art market over the next ten to twenty years, especially as the pressures of globalisation, finance and commercialisation push art into every realm of life – that is to say, contemporary art has already escaped the tradition of being limited to the elite classes. Great contemporary artists are using new mediums, new concepts and new forms to express artistic creativity, setting out from localised experiences to explore the phenomena of drastic social change brought about by the twin forces of globalisation and urbanisation. They interrogate themselves, critique society, and rethink culture, using provocative and innovative visual language to examine the relationships between urban development, social culture and their living environment to present us with a clear picture of the spirit of our times, one that is full of humanist sentiment and sociological value.

Under this unifying theme, how do young “post 80s” artists, hailing from different countries, cultures, religions and environments set out to face society and the challenges of the future? Living in this uncertain social landscape, how do they use different mediums to go against the flow, stand out, resist and declare their own unique artistic language and style? And how do they use artistic creation to engage in reflection and critique of society to stimulate audiences to appreciate and reconsider?

*“Haven't You Heard?”* - Artists of the 80's Contemporary Art Group Exhibition has invited artists from Mainland China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and the Philippines to Hong Kong to reflect their different understandings of life through their art. They use different mediums such as painting, conceptual photography, video and installation to present their contemporary artistic language, share their emotions, trade their experiences and project their different social and personal issues within the context of global urbanisation, using art to express the values of life and existence, in hopes that audiences can hear the ideas of the post 80s generation.





Setting out from Contemporary by Angela Li down Hollywood Road, and passing Man Mo Temple, the Central Police Station Compound, the particular Hong Kong-flavored clusters of Chinese tenement houses, and on to Soho and Lan Kwai Fong, the audience will be treated to a thoughtful and objective look at the relationship between urban development, individuals, social culture and future generations.

**Calvin Hui**  
**Curator / Critic**

Paris, January 31, 2010

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