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Katherine Schaefer of Simon Lee Gallery recalls the drama behind the first show she hosted in Hong Kong and reveals what she loves about the city

By Oliver Giles on Oct 30, 2018

Simon Lee Gallery was part of the first wave of international galleries to open in Hong Kong—and it was Katherine Schaefer who led the charge. Katherine began working for Simon Lee Gallery in [London](#) in 2009, moved to Hong Kong in 2011 and the following year flung open the doors to the gallery's space in Pedder Building—establishing a base in the city before the arrival of [Art Basel](#) persuaded many other international galleries to take the leap.

Over the past six years the Hong Kong gallery has gone from strength to strength, making a name for itself by showcasing both big-name international artists—such as Jim Shaw and Angela Bulloch—and local stars like Chris Huen-Sin Kan.

Here, Katherine reflects on the stress of installing Simon Lee Gallery's first ever show in Hong Kong, explains what she loves about the city and discusses the rumours swirling about artist Cady Noland.

What was the first work of art that moved you?

For me it started with the classics at age 12 with Rembrandt. The beautiful European museums blew me away and it was on a trip to Amsterdam with my family that I first visited the Rijksmuseum—my three brothers bored quickly and my parents left me at the museum with the audio guide. I was glued to the paintings until the museum closed!



Katherine Schaefer photographed in front of Kathryn Andrews' work 8 Ball. (Photography: Michaela Giles/Hong Kong Tatler)

What was the first exhibition you hosted?

Matias Faldbakken was the first artist we exhibited in the gallery in Hong Kong back in 2011. Having Matias as our first artist to visit Hong Kong was so exhilarating. He presented a large locker sculpture, which he marked by dragging through it a laser cutter—defacing the sculpture with a simple line.

There was a touch of drama in planning this show—we had to order a locker from China (and get a single unit rather than 10,000), get it to Hong Kong, then into Pedder Building and up to our space. It was a 10 tonne locker and there was no hoisting back then, so we used 20 blankets for sliding and protection and had 20 guys carry it up the stairs. It took them 20 hours!

It felt bold to be presenting critical, conceptual art right off the bat and I'm so happy we did. This show and many subsequent ones are thanks to the incredible eye, vision and encouragement of Simon Lee—my mentor and someone who I am sincerely indebted to for the experiences I have had in the world of contemporary art.



Matias Faldbakken cutting through a bank of lockers with a laser in Simon Lee Gallery in Hong Kong. (Courtesy Simon Lee Gallery)

What's the most challenging exhibition you've ever hosted?

One that sticks out in my mind is an exhibition titled 1,000 Islands—an ambitious group show presented in 2015 that was

curated by my dear friend Franklin Melendez. Having spent time in a number of artists' studios in New York, Franklin and I wanted to introduce a group of innovative art practices to Asia with a thoughtful and locally-rooted dialogue—the show was organized around ideas of food, consumption, and sustainability.

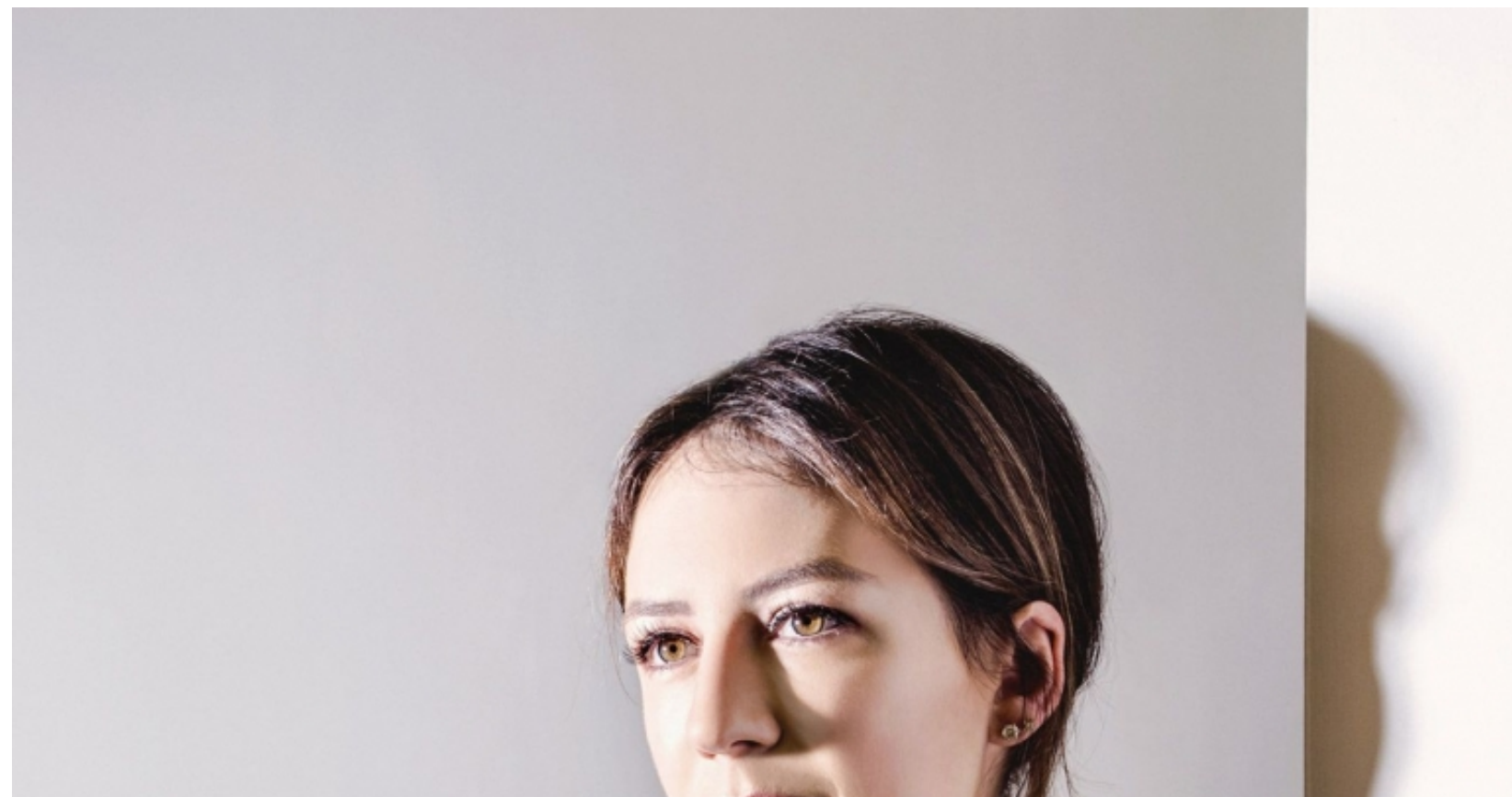
The list of artists was quite international and geographically diverse—including Pierre Huyghe, Lucie Stahl, Aaron Garber-Maikovska, Sean Raspet, Josh Klein and Dora Budor—so from the outset it was quite a logistical challenge.

I remember Josh Kline wanted to use household liquids and pulverised Filipino pesos for his resin ice cooler sculptures in order to address issues surrounding **domestic helpers** in Hong Kong. Josh and the other artists were running around the day before the opening sourcing materials to complete their works!

Is there an artist who you don't currently work with who you'd love to represent?

Many. But if I had one free card for one show or opportunity to work with an artist, it would be Cady Noland. Beyond the stories, mysteries and myths that have been spread by the media since her departure from the art world around 2000, the work she did is that of a truly brilliant woman and total genius of our time.

Rumour has it she now takes buses around New York City with a janitor's key chain around her neck filled with keys to all the places she has her work stashed away.





Katherine Schaefer photographed at Simon Lee Gallery in Hong Kong. (Photography: Michaela Giles/Hong Kong Tatler)

What's the best thing about the art scene in Hong Kong?

The people. Hong Kong has to have one of the tightest art communities—it's small yet so dynamic. Establishing a gallery in a totally new part of the world was of course very exciting but also daunting for us back in 2011.

But being a small community and having only a few local and international galleries means we have the opportunity to really make a difference—the shows we all present are one of the first places for many people in Hong Kong and in the greater Asian

region to experience and get to know contemporary art.

What's the worst?

Logistics. Installing shows on a busy public road right in the heart of Hong Kong with a double yellow line and the space constraints...enough said.

Who's the most recent artist to join your gallery?

A show we recently opened is Kathryn Andrews' Candy Butchers. This is a show that has been in the making for a few years. I remember in February 2016 I was getting ready for a trip to LA to visit a few artists. Before leaving, I had a drink with Yvonne Fong, my longtime sidekick at the gallery, and I suddenly said "Yvonne, why don't you come with me?" Yvonne and I were blown away by our studio visit with Kathryn—it was a total highlight of the trip.

Kathryn is incredibly thoughtful and detailed in her work, and the production of her pieces is always meticulous. Her works have a subtle political stance, which she introduces with an element of humour. It is a current political situation she considers as well as that of being a woman producing art works where the hand of the artist is removed. It's a brilliant show.



Kathryn Andrews, 8 Ball (2018). (Courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery)

What exhibition are you hosting next?

Next we are exhibiting Toby Ziegler's new paintings. It's going to be a great show.

Which exhibitions will you be visiting around the world in the coming year?

As many as I can! One thing I tell all the people that cross my path—who are new to contemporary art—is to just see as much as possible, whatever or wherever it is. This is the best way to grow your eye, your taste and your understanding.

This October there are the European fairs Frieze and FIAC—as well as great shows at the London galleries—and the Carnegie International in the US.



Who in the art world most inspires you and why?

Artists! They blow my mind with their creativity. Sometimes I can't quite believe I have the opportunity of being so close to some of the geniuses of our time.

At art school, you study Richter, Rothko, Basquiat, Picasso and more—sometimes I have to pinch myself that I have the opportunity to engage with today's generation of artists who are creating such meaningful work. It is a total treat and privilege.