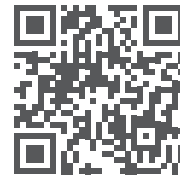


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Neon light: M+, the visual culture museum to open in the West Kowloon Cultural District in 2017, exhibiting at Art Basel

Photo: Yeung Chun Yin

Co-organisers:



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Legislator fears city will forget about art

Big plans for more room for more art but not everyone is happy, as *Brian Yeung* and *Thee Lui* report

An artistic void has been predicted for Hong Kong if the city's Museum of Art is made to close for the next three years for HK\$889 million in expansion and renovation work.

"If the Museum of Art is closed, and M+ at the West Kowloon Cultural District will only be opened in 2017, the public will get used to living without an art museum," People Power legislator Ray Chan Chi-chuen told *Culture Express*. "I would suggest either to delay the project or to keep the museum partially open during renovation."

The city will be spoilt for riches in three years' time if West Kowloon's M+ museum meets its scheduled 2017 opening deadline and proposed work is also completed at the Museum of Art in Tsim Sha Tsui.

But when addressing Monday's Legco Panel on Home Affairs, Chan cast doubt on whether there was an urgent need to launch the Museum of Art project amidst rising construction costs driven by other large-scale infrastructure projects across the city.

Chan also questioned whether there would be a potential overlap between the exhibition policies of the Museum of Art and M+, as both have been tasked with putting an emphasis on Hong Kong art.

But local artist Morgan Wong said work at the Museum of Art should begin as soon as possible. "If you want to achieve a long-term goal, you still need to do it no matter how much time it will take," he said.

Wong also said he was not worried about any potential overlap between the two museums and said they would be showing Hong Kong from different perspectives. "Overlapping is not a problem. They can be complementary," he said.

The Government expects its plans for the Museum of Art will raise potential annual visitor numbers from 900,000 to 1.2 million. At Monday's meeting, it said it wanted to increase the Museum of Art's exhibition area by 42 per cent – from 7,080 square metres to 10,073 square metres – thereby adding four exhibition areas dedicated to the promotion of Hong Kong art. The Museum of Art has been showcasing Chinese fine art and international blockbuster shows, such as the Andy Warhol retrospective that opened here in 2012.

West Kowloon's M+ would meanwhile focus on 20th and 21st century visual culture, including

visual art, design, architecture and the moving image as represented in Hong Kong, China and the region. The museum currently has more than 3,000 artworks in its collection, including 1,463 Chinese contemporary artworks donated by Swiss collector Uli Sigg, and the US\$1 million installation piece *Asian Field* by Antony Gormley, acquired after an anonymous cash donation.

Art critic John Batten said the current exhibition area at the Museum of Art was small but the Government should also be focusing on the design of the work it proposed. He said the architectural style chosen was "not bold or exciting enough" to establish an iconic image for the museum, something the Government has said it hoped the work would achieve.

"They could've done something more interesting in the area with bright colours," Batten said.



Photo: Yeung Chun Yin