

The Navin revolution



Free spirit Navin Rawanchaikul likes to create outside the box

Multi-ethnic and multi-talented, Navin Rawanchaikul defies classification, writes Clare Morin

In the globalising art world, Navin Rawanchaikul represents the transcendence of geographical boundaries. Here is a Chang Mai-born artist of Hindu-Punjabi Pakistani heritage, who now has a Japanese wife (and permanent residence in Japan). His art, therefore, is all about finding communities.

The Thai-based artist is drawing global acclaim for his humorous, cross-cultural art projects. For his first local exhibition at Tang Contemporary Art, the artist decided to use iconic Hong Kong films as the starting point.

Navinscope: Dim Sum Rider features paintings and a billboard that parody scenes from Hong Kong movies. However, in the place of film stars, Navin has painted in people from the Hong Kong art community. "I'm painting now," says the artist over a mobile phone from Bangkok. "I have more than 50 people in this painting, from gallery [owners] to friends of my friends, collectors and critics. I know there are not so many people in the art scene in Hong Kong, but I would like to find the communities." Indeed, those going to the opening on Thursday 17 might actually see themselves.

Such interactive elements are

Navin's hallmark. He first attracted the interest of regional curators in 1995 when he worked with a Bangkok cabbie to create the Navin Gallery Bangkok, a mobile gallery space in a taxi. In 2001, at the invitation of New York's PS1 Contemporary Art Center and the Public Art Fund, he brought the concept to New Yorkers. *I Love Taxi* was an expansive exhibition that included setting up 'taxi cafes' in Madison Square Park and producing his own comic books based on real

"He painted himself as Chairman Navin and created the Navin Party"

interviews with the city's cab drivers. Then he took on China.

In Beijing's Tang Contemporary Art gallery, the artist exhibited paintings that satirised both Chairman Mao's propaganda posters and trends in contemporary Chinese art by painting himself as Chairman Navin. He also created a fictitious Navin Party (check it out at www.navinparty.com). As the site amusingly explains, "Founded by a lonely artist in search of connection and community in 2006, the Navin Party seeks to make a space for Navins in this hectic, increasingly fragmented world." The artist even took to the streets to hand out free copies of a little

red book entitled *Navin's Quotations* – until he got nabbed by the police and was held in custody until a curator arrived to free him.

The premise of the Hong Kong show is to explore the concept of our cultural gatherings, in the spirit of meeting over food. "When I looked at Hong Kong, I saw that food is very important," he explains. "There is also the international side; the international art market is there. So I brought them together: food culture and capitalism."

Audiences will be given the opportunity to meet the enigmatic artist at a talk he will give at the Kee Club on Wednesday 16, organised by the Asia Art Archive. There will be a screening of the film project *Navins of Bollywood*, a musical that parodies Indian movies, with Navin, of course, in the lead. He'll also be screening a commercial film commissioned by Volvo, which he made in Hong Kong in 2005. The work was based on his original Taxi Gallery concept. "It's very experimental. I drove the car with my colleague for three nights. We talked with people in the car. It was produced in Hong Kong, made in Hong Kong, but never shown in Hong Kong. It's going to be a fun talk." We wouldn't expect anything less from the world of Navin. *Navinscope: Dim Sum Rider* opens *Thu 17 at Tang Contemporary Art, B/F, Hollywood Centre, 233 Hollywood Rd, Sheung Wan, 2544 9918; www.tangcontemporary.com. Artist Talk: Wed 16, 6.30pm-8pm. For reservations contact info@aaa.org.hk.*

Preview

Art Tours



Art factory A new hub in Shek Kip Mei

Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre
Every Saturday

If you like to exist on the cutting-edge of life, make your way over to Shek Kip Mei this summer. The Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre, a vast nine-storey converted factory building, has quietly opened its doors for mini exhibitions and tours as part of its soft opening. The space promises to become an important arts hub when it officially opens in late September.

A combined effort from the Hong Kong Baptist University, the Art Development Council and the Hong Kong Arts Centre, the factory stands on ground that once saw the fire that raged through squatter settlements on Christmas Eve 1953. Such powerful collective memories imbue the Centre with a rare sense of history.

After a \$25million renovation grant from the Jockey Club Charities Trust, on top of \$69.4 million donated by the trust to run the project, the result almost resembles the layout of the Tate Modern. While it's still being completed – the cafes and rooftop cinema are yet to materialise – the vast space is packed with potential.

And if you like to hang out with artists, there are plenty to find. We befriended Andy Li, the protégé of renowned landscape master Water Poon. Li and Poon have a small studio titled '520 Little Space', where we sat and sipped Taiwanese oolong tea. And there was a charismatic lone musician called Man Lee, playing his saxophone outside the studio of his music collective 'The Fighting Blues'.

Free tours of the Centre run every Saturday afternoon, in both English and Cantonese, with staff showing everything from artists' studios and the basement Black Box theatre to the vacant sun-drenched roof. *Clare Morin Tours every Sat, 3pm-3.45pm (Cantonese) & 4pm-4.45pm (English). Inquiries: jccac@hkbu.edu.hk; 2353 1311. 30 Pak Tin Street, Shek Kip Mei, www.hkbu.edu.hk/jccac.*