

SUBMISSION

by

The International Association of Art Critics–Hong Kong (AICA-HK)

to

The Consultative Committee on the Core Arts and Cultural Facilities of the
West Kowloon Cultural District

16 October 2007

1. Introduction

The International Association of Art Critics (AICA) is a respected professional international organisation representing art professionals, art writers and critics with its headquarters and secretariat in Paris, France.

The International Association of Art Critics, Hong Kong (AICA-HK) comprises academics, writers, critics, artists, cultural workers, gallerists and curators actively involved in Hong Kong's visual arts scene.

2. General Comments

AICA is in this submission addressing only the Museum Advisory Group's Recommendations to the Consultative Committee of the West Kowloon Cultural District project. We proceed with this submission with the understanding that AICA is not convinced that WKCD is the only or indeed the best solution to enhancing Hong Kong's cultural infrastructure at this time.

However, on a general level, **it is AICA's opinion that MAG's recommendations do represent a marked step forward in the development of a vision and a strategy for the WKCD project.** The proposal of the integrated facility, M+, and the focus on the visual culture of the 20th and 21st century from a Hong Kong perspective, create the possibility of a stronger and more identifiable cultural dynamic for this institution. There is also a greater sense of flexibility in the structuring of the initial four areas of focus, expanding their scope to encompass architecture, design, moving image, popular culture and visual arts. This expanded scope is more reflective of Hong Kong's contemporary cultural climate.

AICA also strongly supports the MAG recommendations that M+ build, house and preserve collections. The related recommended functions of education and outreach;

exhibition and display; and research and publications are of course not only commendable but indispensable.

AICA supports the recommendation of a multi-functional Exhibition Centre in the nature of the European *kunsthalle*, as this was also one of our suggestions in our June submission.

AICA fully supports the MAG's emphasis on the urgency of setting up Statutory Body with an independent Board of Trustees, and the creation of a public trust which would have full ownership of all M+ collections are also fully endorsed by AICA.

3. Concerns

AICA has the following concerns in response to the MAG recommendations:

a. In creating and developing M+ and/or any other new cultural institutions in Hong Kong, it is of paramount importance to identify, utilize, empower and cultivate local talent and expertise in the staffing and running of the institution.

While there is no question that outside expertise will need to be brought in at the highest administrative and executive levels in order to establish a new modality for running a global museum institution in Hong Kong, local expertise, talent and vision will be imperative in developing and running the software of the museum. In general, to date there has been a notable underutilization of experienced local professionals in the visual and performing arts who have made major contributions through independent organizations and activities. Local talent must be empowered and brought into close contact and collaboration with international experts. This is a key prerequisite to making WKCD or any other new cultural institutions truly reflective of Hong Kong's unique cultural perspective on an international scale.

b. The need for museum facilities and programming specifically designed and targeted for children must be addressed.

This issue is not discussed adequately in the MAC recommendations. AICA urges that this issue be seriously addressed and resolved. Arts education in Hong Kong public schools is minimal and inadequate, and peripheral educational activities for children are just that--peripheral. An innovative children's museum would be a valuable addition and complement to the M+ space; or alternatively, could be established elsewhere in Hong Kong. At the very least, a special exhibition space/ collection/ archive for children should be set up within the M+ space.

c. M+'s relation to existing facilities, missions and operations should be more fully explored and defined. A large new investment such as M+ should be tied to a reorganisation of existing resources. A key issue here is also governance. Certainly we support a more independent and robust system - but this should be explained in detail. The hiring of professional staff, their conditions, even salaries should be discussed and defined. Recruitment of principal positions should be international and contract-based (with scope for the incoming director to negotiate significant policy, degree of autonomy and resource issues.) Lack of clarity on these issues will pose a significant problem for institutional development.

4. Immediate Steps

a. AICA recommends the set-up of the WKCD Statutory Authority as soon as possible with an independent Board of Governors comprising enlightened art and culture professionals, architects, business-people, government representatives who are passionate about art and culture. The setting up of a public trust and of statutes clearly defining governance of financial and administrative structures must be accomplished before meaningful development can go forward.

b. If M+ is indeed to become a reality, it is necessary to begin concrete action NOW: thus AICA endorses MAG's urgent call for the establishment of an interim advisory committee of museum professionals and experts, as well as an interim M+ facility for development and training purposes. A key function of the advisory group in this initial phase should be the further development of a detailed and clear-cut vision, mission, and programme for M+ (as well as the other cultural institutions in WKCD), in full consultation with local expertise and, eventually, with the incoming director. Only by developing greater clarity in these areas can professional and public support be won.

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