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Joint Subcommittee to Monitor the Implementation of the West Kowloon Cultural District Project

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 21 June 2016**

Development of M+

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the development of M+ and summarizes major views and concerns of members of the Joint Subcommittee to Monitor the Implementation of the West Kowloon Cultural District Project ("the Joint Subcommittee") on the subject.

Background

2. M+ is a new museum for visual culture in Hong Kong to be located at the western end of the West Kowloon Cultural District ("WKCD"). According to the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority ("WKCDA"), the mission of M+ is to focus on the 20th and 21st century visual culture, broadly defined, from a Hong Kong perspective, the perspective of now, and with a global vision, with its collections encompassing the three main disciplines of visual art, design and architecture, and moving image. Following an international competition, the Swiss architect firm of Herzog & de Meuron, in joint venture with Hong Kong-based TFP Farrells and Ove Arup & Partners Hong Kong ("HdM"), was selected in June 2013 to design and administer the M+ building project. With the commencement of the main works in the fourth quarter of 2015, the target completion date of M+ was the second half of 2018.

3. As advised by WKCDA at the meeting of the Joint Subcommittee on 19 May 2015, as of April 2015, M+ had acquired 4 057 artworks, including 1 741 pieces through purchase and 2 316 pieces by donation. The up-to-date M+ Acquisition Policy and the complete list of the M+ collection had been

uploaded to the WKDCA's website for public information. The Joint Subcommittee was also advised that the governance of M+ would be implemented through the establishment of a subsidiary company wholly-owned by WKDCA as a separate legal entity.

Members' views and concerns

4. Members' major views and concerns on issues relating to the development of M+ raised at previous meetings of the Joint Subcommittee are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

M+ collection

Positioning of M+

5. Members were concerned about the positioning of M+, in particular whether it would place more emphasis on featuring local visual culture and history, and how M+ would rank among other major museums around the world. Concern was also raised about the co-ordination between M+ and the public museums managed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department ("LCSD"). WKDCA was urged to strengthen communication with LCSD on each other's scope of collections to avoid duplication in acquiring artworks.

6. As explained by WKDCA, M+'s vision was to build a world-class collection representative of the 20th and 21st century visual culture from a Hong Kong perspective with a global vision, and its ambitions were to be the first museum of its kind in Asia and to rank among the top five museums for visual culture in the world. In terms of geographical priorities, Hong Kong Art would always be the core of the collections of M+ and would be well represented in the collections. M+ would acquire works from regions further away from Hong Kong more selectively and strategically whereas the acquisition strategy would be more inclusive for regions closer to Hong Kong.

7. The Administration further advised that the collection policy of LCSD museums focused mainly on Hong Kong. Given the different positioning of LCSD museums and M+, the collections of LCSD museums and M+ should complement each other. LCSD and WKDCA would continue to strengthen communication on each other's scope of collections to avoid duplication in acquiring artworks, and also explore the possibility of loaning appropriate exhibits to each other in order to make good use of the resources.

Selection and approval procedures for acquisition of artworks by M+

8. Members noted that WKCDA decided, in June 2012, to adopt the "part gift/part purchase" model in accepting a donation of 1 463 Chinese contemporary artworks, valued at around \$1.3 billion, from Dr Uli Sigg of Switzerland and in acquiring from Dr Sigg 47 artworks for a sum of \$177 million. Concern was raised about the arrangement adopted by WKCDA for accepting and acquiring Dr Sigg's collections and whether WKCDA had put in place an acquisition policy. Some members also considered that WKCDA should not have rushed into acquiring artworks while M+ had yet to build up a full curatorial team and the design of the M+ building had yet to be finalized.

9. WKCDA advised that as recommended by the Museum Advisory Group in its report to the Consultative Committee on the Core Arts and Cultural Facilities of WKCD in 2006, M+ would be built from inside out, meaning that its physical design would be shaped around its visions, ideas and contents that were being formulated over the coming years. As it took time to build up the collection of M+ and in order to seize acquisition opportunities as early as possible, the WKCDA Board established the Interim Acquisition Committee ("IAC") in June 2012 and had also formulated an acquisition policy for M+. All proposed acquisitions (both purchases and donations) would be carefully reviewed in accordance with the strategy and acquisition criteria as set forth in the M+ Acquisition Policy which was available on WKCDA's website for public inspection. Proposed acquisitions were to be approved by different tiers of authority according to the value of the work and the approving authority could set conditions including price ceilings for negotiation purpose. Acquisitions exceeding a certain amount had to be submitted to the WKCDA Board for approval. Procedures on avoidance of conflict of interest of staff/members of the authorities who were involved in advising on/approving acquisitions were set out in the Acquisition Policy. The M+ management was also required to report to the Museum Committee and the WKCDA Board on acquisitions made on a regular basis.

10. As regards the acquisition of Dr Uli Sigg's collection, WKCDA advised that the "part gift/part purchase" arrangement, which was intended as a sign of commitment to the donor, was not an uncommon model in the international arena for museums to obtain collections. Given the scale, completeness and importance of Dr Sigg's collection, WKCDA considered it justifiable to accept the collection by way of such an arrangement, which was approved by the Board of WKCDA.

11. Mr Christopher CHUNG expressed concern about the acquisition of the "Kiyotomo Sushi Bar" made by M+ in November 2013 and considered it necessary for WKCDA to enhance the transparency of the artwork acquisition arrangements of M+. WKCDA explained that the "Kiyotomo Sushi Bar" was

one of the only three still existing architecture interiors designed by Shiro Kuramata, who was regarded as the most influential and widely-known Japanese furniture and interior designer of the late 20th century, and was an important milestone for M+ in collecting and studying Asian designs. It had long been common among major museums of the world to collect interiors and large-scale architectural installations. The acquisition was endorsed by IAC, approved by the Museum Committee and reported to the Board of WKCDA in accordance with the M+ Acquisition Policy. WKCDA stressed that it upheld the principle of prudent financial management and attached great importance to open and transparent policies and operations. M+ had commissioned a leading auction house for an independent appraisal of the work.

Independence of curators and freedom of expression

12. Some members were concerned about how M+ would safeguard the independence and freedom of its curators in deciding on the artworks that they would acquire and display, and whether an artistic accountability system would be implemented in M+ under which curators would be accountable for their decisions on acquisitions and the arrangement of exhibitions. Some other members, however, were of the view that while respecting the freedom of expression, artworks which were indecent/obscene or contained political/insulting messages should not be considered as art. These members called on WKCDA to make careful judgment in selecting artworks to be acquired and displayed.

13. WKCDA stressed that M+ fully appreciated that independence and freedom of expression were vital to the success of any cultural institution, and all acquisitions would be considered in accordance with the guidelines and procedures as laid down in the M+ Acquisition Policy. M+ had recruited a number of seasoned curators who were highly respected in the international museum field, and they would not risk jeopardizing their professional standing by being subject to any types of censorship or regulation in their ways of working. WKCDA assured members that it would implement a management mechanism under which the curators could perform their work most effectively. The curators had different specialties and were responsible for acquisition of collections and solicitation of donations in their particular art disciplines.

Collection costs of M+

14. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan suggested that WKCDA should step up efforts to solicit more donations of works to M+ such that savings achieved in collection purchase could be spent in other areas of work of the WKCD project. According to WKCDA, it would proactively explore different ways to support the project through, among others, seeking sponsorships as well as donations of collections. As of April 2015, M+ had received various artworks as well as

cash donations, the total value of which was about \$1.35 billion. At its meeting on 30 May 2016, the Joint Subcommittee was advised that of the \$1.7 billion (in 2008 Net Present Value) portion of funds allocated for the collection and related costs of M+, \$0.6 billion had been spent as at the end of the 2015-2016 financial year, and around \$0.1 billion was budgeted per year for the next three years on collection acquisitions.

Recruitment and training of staff of M+ team

15. Concern was raised about the training and recruitment of curators and museum professionals for M+ and the nature of work undertaken by local and non-local staff. Some members considered that WKCDA should rely less on foreign experts and strive to recruit local art experts and museum professionals who were familiar with local arts and culture to support the development of M+. These members were concerned how M+, with only a small number of curators from Hong Kong in its curatorial team, could achieve its mission to develop content from a Hong Kong perspective and promote Hong Kong visual culture.

16. WCKA explained that while it was always trying to recruit locally, there was a need to bring in expertise from overseas countries especially in the early stages of the development of M+ and for certain positions for which there was no formal training. This would not only fill the gaps in the skills required for the success of M+, but also facilitate the transfer of knowledge to local talents and help build up local expertise. Besides, M+ had launched extensive internship programmes and a docent volunteer programme as part of its commitment to nurture local talent by offering them unique learning opportunities in renowned international art exhibitions and broadening their curatorial knowledge base. Some interns were hired by M+ after the internship programme on a project basis and one of them was employed as Assistant Curator. As at July 2014, nine of the 18 curatorial staff were young curators from Hong Kong, and M+ would continue to recruit locally, whenever possible, in filling up vacancies leading to the full operation of the museum.

Audience building and grooming of local talents

17. Members were concerned about how M+ could encourage audience participation and raise public awareness of M+. They called on WKCDA to organize activities to introduce the concept and vision of M+ to the public. According to WKCDA, its main strategy for building audience was to organize pre-opening exhibition programmes on the WKCD site and in different parts of Hong Kong. With a budget of about \$15 million per annum being set aside for the organization of pre-opening programmes and public projects of M+, M+ would organize on average two pre-opening exhibition programmes annually and a number of talks, symposiums and public forums to enhance the public's understanding of the concept and vision of M+.

18. Members had also enquired about M+'s plans, especially in terms of its curatorial policy and arrangements, for grooming local visual culture artists and bringing their works to the local and international communities. According to WKCDA, M+ would provide a platform and backing for talented Hong Kong artists to showcase their works. It would also bring artists from other parts of the world to Hong Kong to present their works to the local community, providing a platform for artistic inspiration and exchanges.

19. According to the information provided by WKCDA in May 2016, the M+ Team would focus on organizing exhibitions and events at the M+ Pavilion (previously called Arts Pavilion), which was scheduled for opening in July 2016. The ground floor lobby of the Pavilion would feature a dynamic display of the history of the M+ Mobile exhibition series as well as the evolution of M+ from 2011 to 2016. Thereafter, M+ would present Hong Kong artist Tsang Kin-Wah's Venice Biennale return exhibition. Two more exhibitions focusing on design objects in the M+ Collection, and on Hong Kong's Popular Culture, were under planning.

Cost of the M+ building project

20. In view of the significant escalation in the cost of the WKCD project, members generally considered that WKCDA should make its best endeavour to contain the construction costs of individual facilities of WKCD without compromising the overall quality and functions of the facilities. At the meeting of the Joint Subcommittee on 3 July 2013, members noted that HdM had been selected as the winning design team, the conceptual design of which came with the lowest estimated construction cost at \$5,413 million (Money-of-the-day ("MOD") prices). Members were also advised that WKCDA had already started rigorous negotiations with HdM to further contain the cost to be incurred to within a target budget of \$5 billion (MOD prices) inclusive of fees. WKCDA assured members that it would attach importance to cost control and endeavour to ensure value for money in implementing the M+ project.

21. According to WKCDA, following the approval of the application for minor relaxation of the development intensity of WKCD by the Town Planning Board in November 2014, WKCDA had adopted a cost-effective design for the M+ building by including one additional floor of retail, dining and entertainment facilities and two floors of other arts and cultural facilities. WKCDA expected that this would help generate more rental income at an earlier time.

Design and facilities of M+

22. Some members expressed appreciation of the architectural design of M+ and considered that it would make M+ an iconic landmark in Hong Kong. Some other members, however, were of the view that the architectural design of M+ was too simple and lacked character. According to WKCD, the current architectural design of M+ was selected unanimously by the Jury Panel of the M+ Design Competition as the best design reflecting the core values of M+. The Jury Panel considered that it had the merits of a memorable design that drew its raw power from simplicity and clarity of its "parti", and was the most cost effective amongst all the submitted designs for the Competition. The simple design and generous access of the M+ building would convey the message that M+ was a place where the public could interact with the art, design and other aspects of visual culture in a friendly and welcoming ambience.

23. In response to members' enquiry on the amount of exhibition space in M+, WKCD advised that the area designated for display galleries was between one-fourth to one-third of the total gross floor area of M+, which would be roughly 15 000 square metres. Apart from display galleries, artworks and design and architecture installations would also be displayed in the general public spaces of M+. WKCD further advised that M+ would comprise four main parts: (i) the Found Space which embraced the constraint of the Airport Express tunnels that run beneath the WKCD site and provided a new space for large-scale installations; (ii) the platform above the Found Space which was like a central public plaza having multiple entrances on multiple levels providing direct access to the entire exhibition area, to the park and other WKCD facilities; (iii) the horizontal slab above the central plaza which offered a diversity of exhibition rooms and galleries; and (iv) the vertical building which housed different facilities including education facilities, curatorial centre, research centre as well as retail, dining and entertainment facilities. Unlike most other conventional museums where the conservation and storage facilities were hidden from the public, M+ would be a museum where visitors could see part of the conservation process through the facilities.

24. Members also sought information on whether WKCD had any plans to make use of the external walls of M+ as a display screen for promotion or other purposes. WKCD advised that given that M+ was a museum of visual culture, consideration would be given during the design process to whether and how the museum building itself could be used as a screen for display of images of artistic works or dissemination of other information as appropriate, having regard to the fundamental purpose of the building as a museum, practice of other buildings in the vicinity and other relevant factors.

25. Ms Cyd HO considered that as compared with the architectural design of the exterior of the building, the interior design of the museum was even more important as it should allow flexibility for the staging of different types of exhibitions and enable audience to have an interactive experience in viewing the exhibitions. She called on WKCD A to brief the Joint Subcommittee on the interior design of M+ as soon as practicable.

Governance structure of M+

26. Members noted that the governance of M+ would be implemented through the establishment of a wholly-owned subsidiary company (i.e. M+ Limited) under WKCD A as a separate legal entity. Some members questioned whether the Administration and the WKCD A Board would be able to retain effective monitoring and control over the operation of M+ under the proposed governance structure, particularly in respect of control over assets and finances. Concern was also raised as to whether the funding proposals for M+ would be subject to monitoring by the Legislative Council ("LegCo") under the proposed governance structure.

27. As explained by WKCD A, it was necessary for M+ to establish its own board to enable curatorial and museological decisions to be taken independently by museum professionals and board members with the relevant experience and expertise. The proposed governance structure, which was in line with international best practices, would help enhance public perception of the artistic freedom and curatorial independence of M+, strengthen the capacity of M+ to raise funds and solicit donations in artworks, and put M+ on a similar basis with other major contemporary arts museums around the world. Following the incorporation of the proposed M+ Limited and for the foreseeable future, WKCD A would continue to provide full administrative and manpower support to M+ Limited. Funding allocation to M+ Limited would continue to be managed centrally by WKCD A, and the business and corporate plans of M+ Limited would be submitted to the WKCD A Board for approval after being endorsed by the Board of the M+ Limited. All major financial decisions outside of approved plans would require approval by the WKCD A Board. While WKCD A would retain the overall monitoring and control over the finances of M+ Limited, matters concerning curatorship, programming, collection and acquisition would be under the purview of the Board of the M+ Limited. As with WKCD A, the work of the M+ Limited would be subject to monitoring by LegCo to ensure public accountability.

Latest development

28. The Administration and WKCD A will brief the Joint Subcommittee on the latest progress of the development of M+ at its meeting on 21 June 2016.

Relevant papers

29. A list of the relevant papers with their hyperlinks available on the LegCo website is in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
16 June 2016

**Relevant papers on
Development of M+**

Committee	Date of meeting/issue	Paper
Joint Subcommittee to Monitor the Implementation of the West Kowloon Cultural District Project	23.4.2013 (Item II)	Agenda Minutes
	10.6.2013 (Item III)	Agenda Minutes
	3.7.2013 (Item II)	Agenda Minutes
	29.11.2013 (Item III)	Agenda Minutes
	26.2.2014	Letter dated 25.2.2014 from Hon Christopher CHUNG to the Secretary for Home Affairs regarding the acquisition of "Kiyotomo Sushi Bar" (Chinese version only)
	19.3.2014	West Kowloon Cultural District Authority's response to the issues raised in the letter dated 25.2.2014 from Hon Christopher CHUNG
	28.5.2014 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
	23.7.2014 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes The Administration's response to members' concerns raised at the meeting CB(2)316/14-15(01)

Committee	Date of meeting/issue	Paper
	24.11.2014 (Item II)	Agenda Minutes
	12.1.2015 (Item III)	Agenda Minutes
	19.5.2015 (Item II)	Agenda Minutes
	30.5.2016 (Item II)	Agenda

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