

LCQ20: Storage and display of works of art

Following is a question by the Hon Lee Wing-tat and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (February 4):

Question:

Regarding the storage and display of works of art, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of a breakdown, by categories of works of art and the number of times the works of art had been displayed (five times or below, from six times to 19 times and 20 times or above), of the number of works of art currently stored by the Government, the storage locations for works of art and their respective areas, the supporting facilities of the storage locations and their maximum storage capacities; whether it has assessed, based on the number of works of art acquired annually at present, when those locations will be fully occupied; if it has, of the assessment results; whether it has considered other ways of storage for works of art; if it has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(b) whether the works of art currently on display in government buildings were acquired by the relevant departments themselves; if so, whether it will consider displaying in government buildings works of art which are in storage, as well as adopting measures to encourage private institutions to display works of art at their premises, so as to provide more venues for public display of works of art and improve the interior ambience of buildings; if it will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(c) what policies and measures the Hong Kong Arts Development Council and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department have put in place to assist local young artists in displaying their works; whether it will formulate new policy to assist them in displaying their works (such as displaying works at various public space and public galleries); if it will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

(a) The works of art currently collected by the Government are primarily the art collections of the Hong Kong Museum of Art (“HKMA”) and the Hong Kong Heritage Museum (“HKHM”) of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (“LCSD”). As of December 2008, the two museums had a total collection of 31,483 pieces/sets of art works, among which 15,309 pieces/sets were kept in the HKMA and 16,174 pieces/sets were kept in the HKHM. These collections include:

Chinese antiquities and tea ware 7,624 pieces/sets

Chinese paintings and calligraphy 7,530 pieces

Historical paintings 1,241 pieces

Contemporary art works 7,833 pieces/sets

Design works 7,255 pieces

The art works kept by the two museums are in large quantities and the number of times these art works have been displayed can neither fully reflect the duration of display nor the degree of their artistic significance. For instance, some important works of art are constantly on display in the permanent exhibitions of the museums but will only be counted as having been displayed once. Therefore, LCSD does not record the number of times that each individual art work has been displayed.

Regarding storage, these works of art are kept in the collection repositories of the two museums. The storage areas of the HKMA and the HKHM amount to 1,240 square meters and 3,175 square meters respectively, offering a total storage area of 4,415 square meters. The repositories are both equipped with security installation, fire alarm system, 24-hour temperature and humidity control system (i.e. a special air-conditioning system that can adjust and control the temperature and humidity of the repository to suit different types of collection materials), anti-ultraviolet ray installation, illumination control system, water leakage alarm system, etc. These installations and systems are managed and inspected weekly by professional conservators of the LCSD to ensure that all art collections are properly preserved.

Since the works of art vary in size and shape, it is difficult to accurately estimate the maximum number of art pieces that the two repositories can hold. On the basis of current rate of increase in art collections of both museums, it is estimated that the existing repositories will reach their maximum capacity in five to 10 years. The Government is now considering various options, such as identifying suitable storage space outside the museums, to provide more space for storing art works.

(b) The works of art kept by LCSD museums are collected through either acquisition by the museums or public donation. Apart from in-gallery displays, the museum collections are also loaned to other local or overseas museums, government agencies or public bodies like the Hong Kong International Airport for display, so as to make them available for appreciation by more people. At the request of the Administration Wing, the Government Property Agency has also made arrangement to display the art works presented by Mainland provinces and cities as handover gifts to Hong Kong in the lobbies of several joint-user government office buildings after obtaining the consent of the management committees of these government buildings.

However, we must take into consideration the protection of art works from natural or human damage before displaying museum collections in public areas. The physical condition of the art works as well as the facilities (such as the provision of an environment with constant temperature and humidity) and security of the exhibition venue will affect the feasibility of the display.

Apart from acquiring and displaying museums' collections of art, the Government also brings art to the community through various channels, such as LCSD's Art Promotion Office ("APO"), which is a dedicated government agency for the promotion of public art. The APO joins hands with different organisations regularly to present "public art" programmes that display the works of local artists in public areas such as libraries, parks, shopping arcades, hospitals, MTR stations, ferries, piers, buses, bus stops, etc.

In addition, works of art are permanently displayed in various open spaces managed by the LCSD, including the Kowloon Park, the Hong Kong Cultural Centre Piazza, the Hong Kong Science Museum Piazza, the Urban Council Centenary Garden in Tsim Sha Tsui, the Tsim Sha Tsui East Promenade, the garden of the Hong Kong City Hall, etc. Currently, more than 40 pieces of art works created by 30 local artists are displayed in these venues where pedestrian flow is high. Recently, the LCSD has also collaborated with a private organisation to set up the "City Art Square" in the vicinity of the Sha Tin Town Hall, where 19 pieces of art works are displayed to increase public access to and participation in activities relating to culture and the arts.

(c) The Government is committed to supporting the creation and display of art works by local young artists. As far as LCSD museums are concerned, the HKMA not only

organises exhibitions that feature the art works of local young artists at its galleries on a regular basis, but also promotes their art works to the Mainland and overseas through staging exhibitions at museums or art galleries in Canada, the United Kingdom, Japan, Beijing, Guangzhou, etc.

Since 1975, the HKMA has been organising the Hong Kong Art Biennial Exhibition, which identifies promising local young artists through open competition and exhibition. The Exhibition has now become one of the most important platforms for nurturing local young artists. Last year, the museum launched a new exhibition series “Hong Kong Art: Open Dialogue” to collaborate with guest curators in curating thematic exhibitions that feature art works of a number of young artists.

Since its opening in 2000, the HKHM has staged a total of 27 exhibitions on local culture and arts, including the “Hong Kong Design Series”, at both museum premises and outside venues. More than 200 local young artists have been engaged in these exhibitions.

The APO, in active collaboration with different artists and organisations, also exhibits local art works in public areas through programmes like the “Artists in the Neighbourhood Scheme”, “Installation of Public Artworks at Yat Tung Estate, Tung Chung”, “Public Art Scheme”, “Mobile Art Gallery”, etc. Since its establishment in 2001, the APO has organised about 70 solo or joint exhibitions, presenting art works of some 300 local artists. These programmes provide great opportunities for local young artists to showcase their creativity.

The LCSD has from time to time worked together with the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (“HKADC”) to organise various exhibitions and activities, in which young artists are encouraged to participate. Their recent endeavour is the “2007-09 Visual Arts Thematic Exhibition” project, which gives an overview of the recent development of visual arts in Hong Kong. Since its inception in 2007, more than 200 artists, including about 60 young artists, have taken part in the project.

Furthermore, the HKADC supports local artists or arts groups in holding exhibitions to display their works through its “Project Grant”, “Multi-Project Grant” and “One-Year Grant” schemes. In particular, an “Emerging Artists Grant” is set up under the “Project Grant” to provide support for fresh graduates of arts programmes or formal arts training courses who are having artistic potential and practising the art form with the aspiration to pursue a career as a professional artist. Since 2003, these

various schemes have supported over 200 visual arts exhibition projects, over 100 of which feature art works by young artists.

Ends/Wednesday, February 4, 2009

Issued at HKT 14:33