

Conversation with  
JOHN TAIN,  
Asia Art Archive

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I is for

Institute

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What's in a name? This is the question underlying our investigation into ICA: how it came to be, what it means now, and how we might imagine it in the future.

In a field so often defined by precarity, this project is grounded in a spirit of collegiality, a looking outward that aims to facilitate self-reflection. As such, we have engaged colleagues primarily from small- and mid-scale contemporary arts organizations to discuss their institutional histories and how they understand the stakes of their work. The *I is for Institute* website acts as a repository for these ongoing conversations, as well as archival material relating to ICA's history. We thank our many colleagues for their generosity, enthusiasm, and frankness. Their thinking has in turn energized our own.

— Alex Klein,  
Dorothy & Stephen R. Weber  
(CHE'60) Curator, Institute  
of Contemporary Art,  
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John Tain is the Head of  
Research at the Asia Art Archive  
in Hong Kong.

With Alex Klein and Tausif Noor

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### ALEX KLEIN

You've recently left an institute for an archive. I'm curious to hear a little bit about how that transition was for you, and the mission of the Asia Art Archive.

### JOHN TAIN

Asia Art Archive was founded in 2000 by founding director Claire Hsu, along with Johnson Chang and Jane Debevoise. It emerged basically out of Claire's own experience as a student wanting to work on contemporary Chinese art at SOAS (the School of Oriental and African Studies) at the University of London wanting to work on contemporary Chinese art, but realizing that SOAS — which was supposed to be this whole institution for African and Oriental studies — actually didn't have anything that covered the contemporary period for Asian art. So she really felt that there was a need to create a place where people who wanted to do research in contemporary art in Asia would be able to go.

That was the original impetus for the creation of Asia Art Archive, and while it's a little hard to believe now, since I think contemporary art in Asia is such a thing, but at that moment in time, in 2000, it hadn't really quite had taken off the way that it has now. Since 2000, the organization also has changed, becoming a fully stocked library covering contemporary art from all across Asia, and there's also a number of collections related to archival holdings from artists, curators, and others that help people who are researching various aspects of contemporary art from East, Southeast and South Asia and we're working on expanding.

### AK

How many people work there

JT

There are about 40 people, which include both full time and some part-time people. It's kind of strange, you know? For me, this is downsizing to a much smaller place because I was at the Getty Research Institute, which had 200 people, and that was part of the larger Getty Trust, which had over 1,500 people. I'm going to an organization that has 40 people and saying, "Wow, this is so small and intimate," but I think for a lot of people who work in contemporary art, that's huge.

AK

Right, it is. It's pretty big. How many people have held your position?

JT

I am the third person to be Head of Research for AAA. Phoebe Wong was the first. This position didn't always exist. I think Phoebe became Head of Research towards the end of the first decade of the 2000s, and then, my immediate predecessor, Hammad Nasar, had been here for about three years, until the end of 2016.

AK

What is your purview as Head of Research? What is your mission?

JT

Asia Art Archive as an organization is really driven by research, so this is the core department for the organization. The Research Department is kind of analogous to the curatorial department at the Research Institute at the Getty in that the research team is really the one that builds the collections. I oversee a team of researchers –about eight or nine people currently. This includes researchers who are based in Hong Kong, but also a couple of researchers who are in Shanghai, and another team of researchers who are located in New Delhi.

AK

Is it about amassing a collection?  
Is it collection based?

JT

I think that's something that's evolved over time. Initially, the Asia Art Archive actually had a team of researchers in various cities across Asia. In several major Asian cities, there were Asia Art Archive researchers stationed. About

six years ago, I think, that system changed, and became more centralized. So now, there's a smaller team of researchers who are based in three cities.

Part of what the researchers do is build the collections for the main site here in Hong Kong. At the same time, they are also charged with doing their own research projects. One of the researchers, Michelle Wong, has been working with, a Hong-Kong-based collection, the Ha Bik Chuen archive (Ha was an artist who was based here in Hong Kong, and it is the largest archival collection that AAA has worked with). In addition to that, she's also done other projects: she curated a section of the Gwangju Biennale and has done curatorial endeavors as well.

AK

Just taking a step back to the name "Asia Art Archive," can you talk a little bit about the name itself, and to the archive?

JT

I think originally the name came about without even there necessarily being an archive. The first things that came into the organization were actually books. The idea was that this was going to be a place that could house rare and unique primary-source material that researchers would use. What's interesting about AAA — from my perspective, anyway, having come from the Getty Research Institute, which is a very scholarly, research-oriented organization in some ways — is that while it has a scholarly side, it's also very focused on contemporary art and feels much more in dialogue with what's happening with artists.

AK

That leads to a question of the contemporary, and what the parameters are for the archive. Is it explicitly devoted to the contemporary, and how is it stressed within the mission?

JT

When it was founded, it was definitely about what was happening: the contemporary in the sense of the current. In the initial years of AAA, the researchers were like collectors or chroniclers of what was happening. They would visit places, they would go to exhibitions and galleries, they would attend events, and basically send back material, conduct interviews, do all kinds of stuff. It was like they were journalists for history or something.

AK

Trying to capture it as it's happening so it doesn't get lost.

JT

Yes, basically, they were documenting the now. I think that as the organization got a little older, I think it kind of realized that it could serve the mission of being a resource for the contemporary in a different way, and I think that's when it became more oriented towards looking a little further back in time and building these research collections that really weren't just about what was happening right here, right now, but also a little further back. At this point, the collections extended further back into the postwar period. There are collections that, for example, cover the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. But it really depends because the contemporary is kind of a sliding marker. Asia Art Archive has collections from South Asia, for instance, where the modern and contemporary follows a similar chronology to how it gets understood, say, in the United States. So in that sense, that's where the postwar collections from Baroda come from. But with regard to a country like China, the category of the contemporary doesn't really have much meaning, I think, until the late 1970s or early 1980s. It really depends on the context. The China contemporary collections date from 1980s on, whereas from India or the Philippines there are earlier collections.

AK

It raises that question about global modernisms and all of that kind of messy discourse that's out there at the moment. Is there a mandate that it not stretch back earlier? Is there any 19th century material, or is it pretty clearly 20th century on?

JT

There is no 19th century material. But one of the more ambitious projects that AAA launched is a project that is a bibliography of art writing in South Asia covering the 20th century. There was a whole team of researchers who became involved with this project that the AAA researchers based in New Delhi initiated, which was to document writing on art that came out of South Asia in the first ninety years of the 20th century. It was an attempt to really go beyond just what was available in English and really look at the various languages. So, there's over a dozen languages that are covered by this bibliography, and over 10,000 texts. That really gives a sense of the overall

development of art writing in the subcontinent. As you move across the 20th century, you can see what the centers were, how they move and shift over time, what languages are being used, and what languages are being used to talk about who. So that project is one that spans the entire 20th century. AAA doesn't necessarily limit itself to just the postwar, or strictly speaking, the contemporary, but I would say that most of what we do deals with the contemporary.

AK

I imagine you must be engaging with a multiplicity of languages. That must be challenging in thinking about how you also make this material accessible across domains. Is there also a process of translation for the scholars, or is it really just about having the raw material there?

JT

That depends. AAA's website is a primary mode of access for the material because most people don't necessarily have the means or the ability to come to Hong Kong to consult the material, so we try as much as possible to put the material online. The website is primarily in English. There is also a Chinese parallel site for people who are coming to AAA from mainland China, or from Taiwan, even Hong Kong. As for other languages, it would just be too cumbersome, I think, to try to translate everything into multiple languages.

AK

I'm interested in this because it leads to a question: who is this for?

Is it for the English-language audience that's trying to have access to Asian scholarship?

JT

The material itself is in the source language, whether that's English or Chinese, or Vietnamese, or Thai, or other languages. But the framing of it is in English.

AK

You must have scholars on hand

who understand those different languages to help process those materials.

JT

The team here works with people who are often working onsite, and who can help deal with the linguistic issues, and the researchers generally can work with, the people who are more locally based and help produce the guidance that we need.

TAUSIF NOOR

Who do you look for in terms of researchers? Is it people who have done PhDs on the subject. What kind of expertise is needed to be a researcher for the Asia Art Archive?

JT

I haven't looked for a researcher yet, just simply because I arrived with a full team of people. It kind of varies – there is Anthony Yung, who's I think been here longest among the researchers, and who has been working over a decade at AAA. I think he started working here while he was still in college, actually. In his case, he grew into the position, literally. In other cases, there are people who come from an academic background and who then figure out that this is something that's more amenable to what their interests are than a more standard academic career. So, it depends.

TN

What kind of relationship do you have with local contacts in the three major hubs that you have now?

JT

It depends. For instance, the Shanghai office is really an office, so it doesn't receive the public there. The researchers based there work with the art community that's in Shanghai, but also beyond there. We're doing a project right now in inland China, away from the coastal cities, away from the known parts of China, more like the Xinjiang area.

We're trying to reach out to more diverse or underrepresented parts of China in those cases. It's not specifically serving those audiences in the sense that we're not sending out a library there or anything like that.

We do have a mobile library program that's circulated in different parts of Asia so in that sense, we do try to make the materials available to different audiences, but for the most part, the physical material, when it's books, anyway, is available in Hong Kong. The New Delhi office also has a small library. Both sites – in Hong Kong and New Delhi – host events for people to attend, and they're there as resources for people to use and learn about whatever it is they want to learn about. I think they're both pretty well integrated into the arts community. I don't think it's necessarily busy, but I think they have a good presence.

The Hong Kong office takes special care to make sure that it's addressing the needs of a local audience. There are collections that document the development of contemporary art in Hong Kong. For example, the archive of Ha Bik Chuen, which is the largest collection that AAA has. Ha's archive is a very important one because it's not so much about his own career, but really about documenting the exhibition history of Hong Kong and elsewhere, especially from the 1960s forward. It provides this very rich history just in that one archive of what was happening in Hong Kong, and not just Hong Kong artists, but also when artists from the Philippines would exhibit in Hong Kong, or an artist from China would come. Ha was someone who basically was an inveterate documenter of other people.

Beyond the collections, AAA also has a program called Learning and Participation, which works with local art teachers in secondary schools. They bring themselves, and they also bring their students, so that they can work with the materials that are in the collections and work with the researchers. So to that degree, the Hong Kong site is actually very involved with a local audience.

AK

I'm curious to hear a little bit more about the public-facing dimension of AAA because the website seems so important, but then there are also these physical hubs. I'm curious to hear a little more about how people engage with the material that you have and how much of it is dependent on the architecture and the physical locations, and how much of it is the web-based platform.

JT

That's something that is interesting. There's a library, and people come and

use the library, and we host school groups, and lecturers, and all kinds of activities that take place onsite, but a lot of people – if not most people – access the materials via the website. In that case, it's mainly about the research collections, but also recordings of programs and other kinds of media that are hosted on the website. But the interesting thing to note is that the large bulk of what AAA has is neither available via the website, nor physical material that can be consulted in the library, but actually, material that is digitized, but for copyright reasons, cannot actually be put online.

AK

Oh, interesting.

JT

It's a little deceptive because people think, like, "Oh, well, it's either physical or it's online," but there's actually a great deal of material that can be consulted on a computer, but it has to be done so onsite.

AK

Interesting. So, you can't give someone a special password to consult through the Asia Art Archive's website? You'd have to physically come to the location?

JT

Well, yes and no. For instance, there's a researcher, an art historian named Iftikhar Dadi who's based at Cornell. He's worked very closely with AAA on certain collections. And so, through a special arrangement, Cornell actually has a terminal that basically counts as an extension of AAA's – it's set up so that terminal – that computer – is almost a transoceanic extension of AAA into Ithaca, New York.

AK

That's interesting. It's like the new phase of microfilm or something.

JT

And we're looking to establish more outposts. But for the most part, it's like the way that copyright works. You either keep it to your institution or you don't. It's less about the password protection, it's more about the site of it.

AK

Is that part of the mandate as new materials come in, do you immediately

digitize them?

JT

We try to digitize as much and as quickly as possible, since the research collections are built through digitization. Working at AAA has changed the way I think about access. For instance, while I was at the GRI, I had just basically thought, “Well, all materials should be available to everyone,” unless there’s some really compelling reason, like privacy issues or something like that. And then, last week, when I was in Beijing, we were meeting with Li Xianting, an art critic who was one of the people who helped create contemporary art in China by curating exhibitions and writing about the art. He’s now retired, but he and his wife, were talking about the various scandals that were happening. On WeChat, there was something that was circulating against a group of artists, which accused them of various crimes such as fiscal malfeasance, like the way that Ai Weiwei has been accused of tax dodging, things like that. And so, they were pointing out that they couldn’t let anything in their archive get into the wrong hands, because all those letters and all the correspondence from the 1990s – anyone could use any of that against anyone, at any moment in time.

AK

That points back to some classic questions about the power of the archive, right?

JT

Yes.

AK

There’s been a lot in the news lately about China’s reach into the Hong Kong publishing industry and the censorship actions that have been taking place. Has that affected the work that you do in the archive?

JT

Fortunately, it has not. I think AAA has managed to stay relatively under the radar; at least it hasn’t run afoul of anyone as far as I can tell. Which is not always the case. For instance, when I was in Beijing, I could not use Dropbox. I was working on a project, and I was supposed to look at a manuscript, and I couldn’t look at it. I ended up managing to download a PDF, but when I tried

to look up some of the references, I couldn't access WorldCat without VPN. I even tried to access the Getty Research Institute's website, and it was kind of coming up, but it was really, really glitchy. So even just looking up titles to books can be a sensitive matter. AAA's website doesn't need any special kind of setup, so in that sense, people have pretty easy access to it, which is good. Most libraries actually try to stay clear of any kind of restrictions, so it was kind of surprising to see that WorldCat was not one of the sites that you could access without VPN.

TN

I have a question that kind of relates to AAA's legacy from the early 2000s. Now you have, let's say, the MoMA C-MAP program or the Tate Research Centre: Asia. All of these institutions, these museums, are going out and kind of doing the same sort of work, but for their own collections. Has AAA interacted or connected with these particular research initiatives? How do you see your relationship to these kinds of institutional/qua-institutional approaches to research?

JT

I haven't necessarily been involved with these kind of previous instances, but there have been occasions when AAA has collaborated for instance, with MoMA and C-MAP, or worked with Tate on specific projects. AAA as an organization is not particularly proprietary, and generally, very open about sharing information and working with other organizations on I think AAA staff have contributed to posts at C-MAP at MoMA. I think we – AAA as an organization – have worked with various institutions over time. It is interesting that since AAA was founded, I think because of its prominence in the contemporary art scene in Asia, it's inspired a lot of people who have set up archives or even research institutions. For instance, in Taiwan, there is a Taiwan Contemporary Art Archive. These organizations exist.

Those are smaller examples, but, you know, a larger one would be the Asia Culture Center, which is in Gwangju, which was started off, with the idea that it would be this large institution that would represent all of Asia and make Gwangju the cultural capital of Asia. As far as I can tell, since its initial

opening, it hasn't really been so active in this respect, and I'm not sure that it is necessarily focused on contemporary art. But I don't know if people, when they undertake these initiatives, if they always understand, how much work it is not just to start an archive, but to keep it going. In Beijing, there were places that I would pass by, and they would call themselves archives, but really, they weren't archives, they were museums or galleries, but I guess people like the sound of "archive." Maybe it makes them sound more serious or something.

AK

Where did the funding come from initially and where does it come now for AAA?

JT

It came from and it still comes from mostly private sources. The majority of the funding for AAA comes from individual donations. It also receives foundation grants, and also, some government funding, but for now, anyway, most of the support comes from private individuals. One of the things that I had always thought was really great about working at the Getty was not having to fundraise. It just has its endowment, and it functioned pretty smoothly on that. When I took the jump over to AAA, I was kind of worried about what that was going to be like.

It's true, you do have to think about the budget, but at the same time, it's kind of been amazing to see, how people have been supportive of the institution. You don't necessarily think people are so supportive – people support museums, but you don't necessarily think people who aren't scholars would necessarily support a research institution.

AK

One of the questions we've been interested in is who your organization sees as its peers – conceptual peers, or actual peers. Who are you in dialogue with?

JT

We're in dialogue with a variety of different organizations. One measure of that would be who AAA collaborates with. For instance, right now there is a project that AAA has been undertaking called London Asia, and that's with the Paul Mellon Centre in London, for the study of British art. The Mellon Centre has recognized that London is not just for European culture, but also has been an important kind of cultural hub for artists who come from Asia or who are identified with Asia in various ways. That collaboration is about the migratory

or global aspect of people's careers and trajectories.

There are also art projects that AAA has undertaken with M+, which is the museum of visual culture that's based in Hong Kong. AAA has done projects with Para Site. What's nice about AAA is it is kind of inbetween. It works with large-scale organizations like M+ or MoMA, but also is flexible enough that it can work with smaller organizations like Para Site. It really does try to be very down to earth and not too institutional in its outlook.

AK

When we first started the conversation, you said that one of the things you were interested in is expanding AAA's reach. What are you hoping to achieve under your tenure as Head of Research?

JT

I think that one of the things I would like for AAA to do is to really be able to grow its collections. The research collections have been something that have been growing for the last ten years, and there's amazing items, for instance, the Vivan Sundaram or Geeta Kapur archives, there's the archive of Salima Hashmi, a foundational artist for Pakistan, and these foundational figures, including Zheng Shengtian, Zhang Peili in China, or Roberto Chabet from the Philippines. But, I think there's more that could be done, so I'm hoping that AAA can expand its East, South, and Southeast Asia holdings, but also include West Asia and do more in that regard. I think one of the institutional goals is also to expand its work in kind of a more scholarly vein, so that's one thing that I'd like to develop.

TN

That's another instance where the name is really interesting, right? Because an archive is something that's never completed. It can be something that's extended forever, and it exists by accumulating more. In having that name, that goal is kind of embedded, which is really interesting.

JT

Yes.

TN

It's almost a given that as something accumulates, there will be even more gaps.

AK

I'm curious, because you worked at a mega archive previously, does the "institute" model of the archive have a different kind of approach to collections than the AAA, or is that just a semantic distinction?

JT

They're actually very different, in the sense that the GRI has a very deliberate process of approaching collections. It can just take a while for things to happen, whereas, at AAA, things move faster. I think the criteria of selection is also somewhat different. I think the GRI has this kind of self-identified mission to collect the most important material, however you define that. Maybe the most representative of certain networks, and certain movements, and certain artists.

Asia Art Archive, I think, for its part, is certainly interested in the representation of national scenes. But at the same time, I think it really is trying hard to give voice to what hasn't been considered or what hasn't been thought of, and to really give some depth, I think, to the way that people think about contemporary art in Asia. It's not just what happens to be found in galleries or at the art fair, but to just really have a more three-dimensional view of what is happening in different parts of Asia.

AK

Right. So, not just the Western market's perception of what's happening.

JT

Exactly. Related to that: art in Asia as elsewhere happens to be heavily male-dominated, so, when we had the Guerrilla Girls come and do a project with us during Art Basel, that was partly to look at what was going on in Hong Kong in terms of its institutions and galleries. Art collections here are

mostly by men, by male artists. Even with AAA's collection, we came to the unhappy realization that our own collection is heavily male-dominated: less than 10 percent comes from women artists. That's not to say that we don't have women writers or women curators, but as far as women artists go, it's less than 10 percent of the holding, so it's pretty low. So, one of the things we're trying to do is find some way to balance that and to have more female representation in the collections.

TN

Have you found that living artists are now thinking of their kind of legacy differently as result of something like Asia Art Archive? Are they working with AAA to maintain their legacy as part of the archive?

JT

Yes and no. I think that in the United States, this kind of thing has become much more widespread, or that way of thinking has become much more widespread thanks to some initiatives. Institutions like the Archives of American Art, or the Fales, or the GRI, but also foundations like the Joan Mitchell or others, have really been successful at getting people to think about these issues, about documenting their estates and their careers. That is something that has made this work much easier in the U.S. But, in Asia, there aren't so many institutions that serve artists, and so, it's still not really that widespread. I was talking earlier about, you know, being in Beijing and talking with Li Xianting. I mean, in his case, there is no one in China – in mainland China – that he would be willing to trust his papers with. If it goes to a state organization, then they could disappear, and or be used in other ways. If it goes to a private organization, the concern is that they wouldn't necessarily feel a responsibility to maintain it over time. And that's in a country with a billion people.

It's also the case with India, which is a very populous country, but doesn't yet have the infrastructure in place that can support that kind of work in maintaining the artistic history of the country. And so, for those reasons, I think AAA does its work and people do know about it, but for the most part, people still don't have quite have the consciousness of, like, "I need to save everything," or "There's a place where this can go." Given the political histories of many Asia nations, it's understandable that artists' attitudes can be somewhat fatalistic, because they don't want it to end up with the state. So in some ways, they'd rather just not be anything left after they're gone.

AK

Right. So, do you find that is a part of your job, to liaise to try and save these things? I remember when you were at the GRI you were often traveling around the world talking to people about their collections, and bringing them in. Is that part of what you do at AAA?

JT

Partly, but it's a little different because AAA works primarily through digitization. So part of it is preserving material, and making it accessible that way. One of the things that I'm also trying to kind of get people thinking about is the physical material and how to preserve that as well, and what that might mean and why that's important and necessary work as well.

AK

Right. So, part of it is about an educational outreach about the function of the archive.

JT

The function of the archive, but also, it's an education for me to kind of understand the viewpoint of people who experienced different histories. So understanding why it might make sense for someone to think, "Well, you know, my archive will just disappear when I die, and that's for the best." In some cases, it could have been that that might make sense, because at least it doesn't end up in the wrong hands.

AK

You don't want to impose a kind of colonized reading on something that then actually puts someone in harm's way.

TN

This idea of passing on a legacy is interesting in the context of India in the post-independence period. A lot of contemporary artists, like Vivan Sundaram for instance, are

the heirs to incredibly important artistic legacies; in Sundaram's case, it's Amrita Sher-Gil's archives. For something like Asia Art Archive to have a public repository of private, familial collections is an indication that things are changing. There's an idea of access from private collections to public collections that forms new and interesting dialogues.

JT

I think that part of what's been great is seeing how people really understand that AAA is in some ways a labor of love, and it's not something that has an ulterior motive. It's been really heartening to see. One reason that AAA doesn't really want to collect physical materials is because it doesn't want to be seen as coming into a country and then taking its patrimony out. That's something that we're very mindful of. We don't want to be seen as violating that sense of intactness, which is letting people hold onto their heritage. But, at the same time, sometimes, it can also be the case that even just digitizing material is somehow too much. I hear sometimes from our India researchers that people have a suspicion of AAA because it's based in Hong Kong. They think Hong Kong is like China, and so, "Oh, why would we ever give our things to a Chinese organization?" They don't understand that AAA isn't a Chinese organization, it's based in Hong Kong, but it doesn't have that specific kind of profile.

AK

What is your process for digitization? And thinking about technology, how do you ensure that the material you've digitized will last through technological evolutions?

JT

The digitization process is pretty standard. It's scanned or photographed, depending on what it is. And then it gets processed so that there's metadata attached to it. Then it gets uploaded and put online and into a database. Those are kind of the three basic steps, as far as ensuring that it's really of use. The digitization is of relatively high quality, and so, that's one way of

doing it. Another way of really trying to make material as relevant as possible is the very specific kinds of metadata that are attached to it. One of the things that AAA does that's, I think, unusual is that, when it digitizes material, if it's a photograph of an exhibition, one of the metadata categories is actually the exhibition itself. So if people are looking at exhibition history, they would be able to type in an exhibition and get all the photographs that correspond to that exhibition. That's one way of extending the research possibilities of what's been digitized. And then creating these kind of dense networks. The exhibition history is one category, but then, if you fill out each exhibition with the artists who are in it, then you can kind of do these complex searches that would generate a more sophisticated view of what was happening at a particular moment, or a particular place, or what's happening across time, even.

AK

If someone comes to you with a collection, and they want to donate it to you, will you accept it, or do you say, "We really only want to digitize it, and we'd prefer you to find a physical location for it elsewhere"?

JT

Well, there are physical collections that are housed at AAA, but it's not exactly something that we're looking for. That's definitely a big difference from what I was doing at the Getty, which was primarily about the collections. There were so many things that they didn't even really think about digitization as a serious endeavor – not for all of the collections, anyway.

AK

Right, right. So, this is much more about amassing as much information as possible and getting it out there.

JT

Yes, and in some ways, digitization can be very, very slow. But, in some ways it does allow for a certain kind of flexibility.

AK

When did you start, again? It hasn't been that long.

JT

I started mid-October.

AK

Mid-October. So it hasn't even been a full year yet, but I'm wondering if, as you're getting to know the landscape, if there have been any frustrations so far. We've talked a lot about the kind of exciting possibilities and the things you're thinking about, but I'm wondering if there's anything that has been a roadblock or if it's still kind of wide open.

JT

It's not necessarily a roadblock, but I am still feeling out the capacities of AAA as an organization, understanding that we can't do everything all at once, and just being able to pace that. The funny thing is that I feel like in some ways, AAA – even though it's smaller – can respond much faster than the Getty could. It's kind of like simultaneously understanding it can't do everything, but then also having the organizational agility to work quickly when needed. Sometimes, things move so quickly that I have to set aside time to actually be able to reflect. Whereas at the Getty, sometimes it was slow enough that it could feel like there was all the time in the world. But, now, it's like, "Wait, where'd the time go?"

AK

Yes, because how many years were you at the Getty again?

JT

I was there for ten years.

AK

And AAA's coming up on a 20th anniversary soon as well?

JT

Yes, in just a couple of years.

AK

Is that something that's on your radar as a point of reflection?

JT

I think it's crossed my mind, but it's not something that's being actively discussed just yet. There are a few things that AAA is working on in terms of its infrastructure. I'm trying to implement certain kinds of procedures and ways of doing things that haven't really been put into place, and so, part of me is just helping the organization maybe mature a little in terms of how it does things

The other thing is there's the hope that AAA (it's currently in a temporary location) will find a more permanent home.

AK

Right. Would it be a more public-facing building?

JT

Not necessarily more public-facing because it's already pretty accessible, it's just that we have outgrown it. I think the idea is a place that would allow for the collections to just have a little more room, and maybe more space for us to just be able to work.

AK

I'm curious how Hong Kong has been for you? It seems like this year everyone was at the Hong Kong art fair. Does this increased momentum around the contemporary art landscape and the market in Hong Kong have an effect on the work that you do?

JT

Hong Kong itself is changing a lot to be sure. When I arrived here in October, that was kind of one peak moment because the fall is a very busy time in the Hong Kong art and social calendar. I learned very quickly that March, which is when Art Basel takes place, is the other peak. Basically, the fall and spring seasons are the busiest moments. The summer quiets down and winter is Christmas break, so basically, a little quieter in between. It's kind of crazy, the number of galleries that have opened here, the number of people who are interested in contemporary art. Whereas maybe 15 or 10 years ago, Hong Kong

was not a place that particularly stood out, I think, for anyone in terms of contemporary art. While the energy and excitement that Art Basel has brought to Hong Kong is great, and very much welcome, the work Asia Art Archive does provides different understandings of how, and under what contexts, contemporary art can function, not just here, but across the region and the world.

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