

**Hong Kong Arts Development Council
International Arts Leadership Roundtable 2016**

Plenary 2: The Change of Arts Spaces

Arts Spaces at Tai Kwun

Full transcript of the speech by

Mr Euan Upston, Director of Central Police Station [Hong Kong]

The first thing I am going to talk about is arts spaces in Tai Kwun (大館). The company is called the Jockey Club Central Police Station (JCCPS). That is not a fantastic brand to take to the market, so we call it Tai Kwun. Tai Kwun is the old name that the locals refer to the space, a name which is a police headquarter's building but also inferred to the whole space. The whole site was a one-stop shop for British justice. You get nicked on the street, charged in the barrack block, hold over at the magistrate, convicted, fined and you are straight up to Victoria Prison. It is unique in the world. What we are trying to do here is activate the space by engaging with our heritage, forming arts across a whole spectrum of performances, etc. I will give some background for those who are out of town.

This is a partnership between Hong Kong government and the Hong Kong Jockey Club (the Jockey Club). To be quite clear I will give credits to the Jockey Club here and now that I don't think anyone else in Hong Kong could have done this. Their commitment to restoration is excellent. Setting best standards, for example, engaging preservative conservation of architects, heads of the Herzog de Meuron as the architect for the new buildings, and also the unsung hero is Rocco Design Architects, who are the executive director, we would never get anywhere without Rocco and its understanding of how you do with the Buildings Department.

As you can see these are the key drivers we are looking for. The location is important. It is in Central. Arts spaces, in particular, have been driven out of Central by rents and etc. We are bringing an open space back into Central. One of its key drivers is location. The key political figure to remember here, this will give you the background. It is not a shopping mall. Only 27% will be for commercial development, food and beverage mainly, and retail. That is the whole sustaining operation to pay for the operating company but also to pay for the sinking fund, because these are sixteen old buildings that are going to require a lot of maintenance. The other key that people are going to love is 46,000 square feet of open and free wifi space in Central.

Old Bailey Galleries. We have an interesting model which I will elaborate on later. As Old Bailey Galleries, it recognises it is straight right next to Wattis Gallery. It has a heritage in the

location. It is also reflecting some terms and conditions in our tenancy agreement. My model is it will be running contemporary arts shows. It will be Hong Kong-centric. That's the first place to start. And then we have a strapline, for which is locally loved, i.e. Hong Kong-centric, regionally respected so we are reaching out to the regions and knowing where we are, and is internationally admired.



First let's talk about the formal arts spaces. They are quite extraordinary, because here we have 6.7 m high ceilings, which may not be that high according to West Kowloon Cultural District, but for us in Central that is extraordinary. It is designed by the same architect of West Kowloon by the way. It is 15,000 sq metres of space, sufficient to handle major and significant exhibitions. The great thing about this space is that it is connected to F Hall. F Hall is the top floor of the building, with low building sitting next door. It is adaptive use gallery space. Going from a formality to an architect-designed space into an old printing workshop which has got columns. Columns are a godsend to anyone who operates a gallery. They are not a godsend to an architect who wants to have nice and clean spaces. This gallery is subdivided very easily, very cheaply. Lots of people don't think of the operating costs of spaces when they designed them, but this is a fantastic space. The higher spaces demand a lot more staff and money. My favourite example is QAGOMA (Queensland Art Gallery & Gallery of Modern Art) in Queensland, where the ceilings are even higher. How many people are taken to change the light bulb? And that's when you start to realise it costs. There is an operational cost every time you do it. Therefore, sustainability is going to be key driver as we move forward on these arts space discussions. They do not exist in a vacuum.

From this cover image you can see the top one has sky lights. We will have natural light in. It seems to be artists' and curators' fetish to have skylight. I personally don't think it is that useful. I did have to put some in Museum of Contemporary Art of Australia (MCA) in Sydney, but they are not used that often. I think these will be used less often, because sometimes you overheat for another second in Hong Kong because of buildings. But these arts spaces, 400 square metres each roughly, just to prove we are building it. You can start to get a scale of what this is going to look like. That is the formal arts spaces.

This is my favourite F Hall, the adaptive use of space. It's now been used as storage depot, but it is actually quite well-advanced. We are looking it out in late 2016, we are on time and on revised budget. We are exactly like M+, which is also on time and on budget.

This is a fantastic staircase. It looks stunning and people are going to love it. But it uses up half the space of another staircase standing right next to it. You cannot use it for fire exit, so you have to build a fire stair next to it, which means the core of your building expands and you have less exhibition space. In 2014, this decision was actually poured in concrete. I don't think I would have won the battle to take the spiral staircase out anyway. If people are going to get engaged and talk about arts spaces and project, look at the operational practicality.



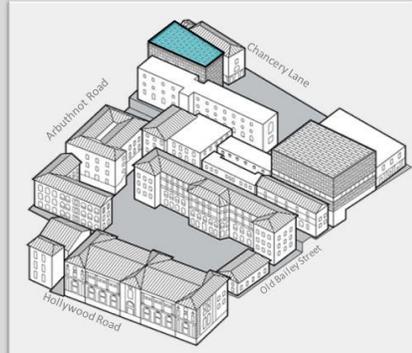
We come to an open operating model, which is quite unique. Old Bailey Galleries would not be presenting in its own name in the initial opening model. We will be working in collaboration with other arts groups, primarily from Hong Kong, but we will also reach out and work with the arts groups from the region and also internationally. What we have is we are not simply giving the keys to other arts group. We are developing exhibitions with other arts groups. Our own arts team is responsible to the curatorial direction of the space, and they will then work closely with whoever organisation they have selected to make sure we are developing our operations. It gets very problematic in terms of dealing with officials such as legal, but on the other hand, we are not reinventing the wheel or imposing a whole lot of the new arts in Hong Kong. We are saying to people, who are located in Aberdeen or Cattle Depot, come to Hong Kong, come into Central, build the audiences in Central, such a wonderful audience building opportunity for local groups. We also put out an open call to ensure we have some degree of transparency. There have been a lot of comments about the Central Police Station project being under the radar. I think it has been under the radar for too long. We started to move to a more public forum to engage with all the community groups.

These are the range of activities we will have. It is normal to take a third-tier museum operating model. It is nothing huge. It's not a Tate Modern. It is not an M+. We will work very closely with M+ because we are developing organisations and we are providing artists and material to M+ and vice versa, so we can then borrow from the M+ to supplement our exhibitions. It is a win-win situation for Hong Kong.

Artists in Residency. I know we have been talking about funding. I want you to make sure that you've got my card. These residencies will be available for Hong Kong artists as well. Hong Kong artists working in downtown Central not have to be somewhere other than Aberdeen. It will be a great opportunity and it will be free. The only request we would have from our artist in residency would be to contribute to our education programmes, e.g. an artist's talk, a craft workshop, etc. I don't think trying to get arts out from a pure exhibition is the right way to go. This is about finding space for artists to develop themselves, and also experience Hong Kong for those who haven't been to Hong Kong. It is what cultural exchange would all be about. Apart from the residency you can see the restoration work.

We also have an auditorium (Arbuthnot Auditorium). I have left the formal space behind. I built the art gallery, it's programmed and it's running. We now have a 200-seater. When I arrived, it was going to be a black box (theatre). I have a theatre background, so I know about black boxes. They only do about 60 or 65%, nothing to a 100%. So I made a decision very

Arbuthnot Auditorium



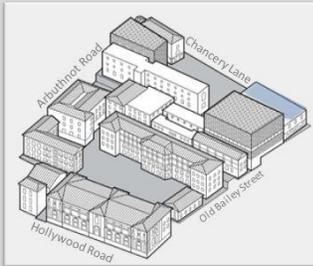
early on. We could have one form of thing we could do something to a 100%, and that is film, artist's talks, video conferencing, conferences, etc. We fully care about high-tech specifications and music performances. There is also no wing spaces, so there is nowhere for actors to go off-stage, even if we stayed with the black box. Here you can see a construction photo. They are rendering. The architect has got the relationship really right. If you stand on the stage, particularly as an actor, you will get the sense that you can reach out and touch the audience. It will be a wonderful space.

Let's look at our informal spaces. This is the adapted few sites. The first informal space is actually directly below the gallery up about the old F Hall. We will look at this as more of a community space, so groups of artists, who might not make the cut for the formal gallery programme, can come here to present their shows downstairs. It is fully air-conditioned with full lighting, etc. We will also use it for heritages exhibitions. Heritage interpretation is probably the main driver of the site, and contemporary arts is secondary driver. What we are doing is taking this wonderful space Jockey Club is investing in as a gift to the people of Hong Kong, and we want to make sure that we can tell them the story of the site, because the side is also about storytelling, about the people that lived there. We have started to talk to lots of groups and programmers around town, because we are looking to be running by the end of this year.

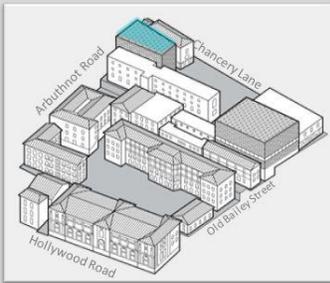
This is the next F Hall. We are showing how this will be multi-purpose. This is actually the entrance before you go into lower F Hall, but it also tells a story of processing of prisoners, ten steps to go through before you finally lose your freedom. At the fiery into that wall, behind with that man standing, you will have the measuring lines and you get this photo taken, and that is how high you are before you get locked up. Then you will do it again when you come out and you will be much shorter. This is how we are going to revitalise this space. That ceiling there is actually underneath the auditorium. The outdoor seating space is semi-sheltered. It has its own outdoor cinema, so we can run from the control room. We have full capacity for a free screening, and the Auditorium here can run here with full sound system etc. Or we might be running artists' videos here, depending on what our programming is. It is the place right next door to one of my favourite bits. You can see there it is being built, and the concrete steps... (Laundry Steps)

Informal Art Spaces at Tai Kwun

G Floor F Hall: Flexible Multi-purpose Space



Laundry Steps under Arbuthnot Auditorium



This is my favourite bit. It is a leftover, the bottom of E Hall which is now a box office. One of the dreams I have for this space is to make it an annual commission. In the summer, even if I put fans in it, it is going to be too hot to spend any more time than five minutes. I would like to have an annual commission that regularly revolves with contemporary arts installations.

It is glorious and it is the most stunning space. We are also going to put up pop-up shows in prison cells. Some people thought of 2017. We will be reactivating all sorts of programmes. Outdoor spaces, the Prison Yard, the Parade Ground, as I said, unique. We are running public artworks. We are commissioning those. Probably only three when we open but there will be

more after that. Prison Yard is looking a bit messy at the moment but it is much nicer than it used to be. The Parade Ground is also looking messy. Barrack Lane is sorts of a weaving lane that goes through. They all got hanging points now so you can hang installation offers and people. We also have the Rooftop Spaces, the Exterior Wall of D Hall and so forth.

Outdoor Spaces at Tai Kwun

Prison Yard



To wrap up, I heard this morning about the artists. One of the successes of the MCA (Museum of Contemporary Art of Australia) was that the artists were also at the core of everything we did. This is something we have to embrace as an organisation. If we don't have artists, we don't need exhibition spaces. We don't need curators. The artist itself is a key driver. The audience, where we play a big part, because we will be in Central, we are the dropping point. We can go in and get a cup of coffee, and then maybe take in an arts experience. The organisations out of town bring into this bustling centre and put on contemporary arts shows. They will be supported by a full marketing team and social media etc.

I have only been here for eighteen months. I am not a student of Hong Kong history. When I am thinking about what is happening in Hong Kong, I think Hong Kong really needs to have something like that in the Central, that can engage and help develop the contemporary arts footprint of Hong Kong, here regionally and internationally, is something Hong Kong really needs. We have a lot of big stuff coming up, but this is actually quite small and intimate. It is contemporary arts buried and enriched by the heritage of the site. The great takeaway I would like people to have, irrespective of the arts spaces, is when they come into the site for whatever they are doing, they will come in and have a feeling and a sense of "this place is for me", "it is actually developed for me", whatever their particular approach is. That is the goal. Come and visit us at the end of 2016. You can let me know whether it has succeeded or not. Thank you very much.

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