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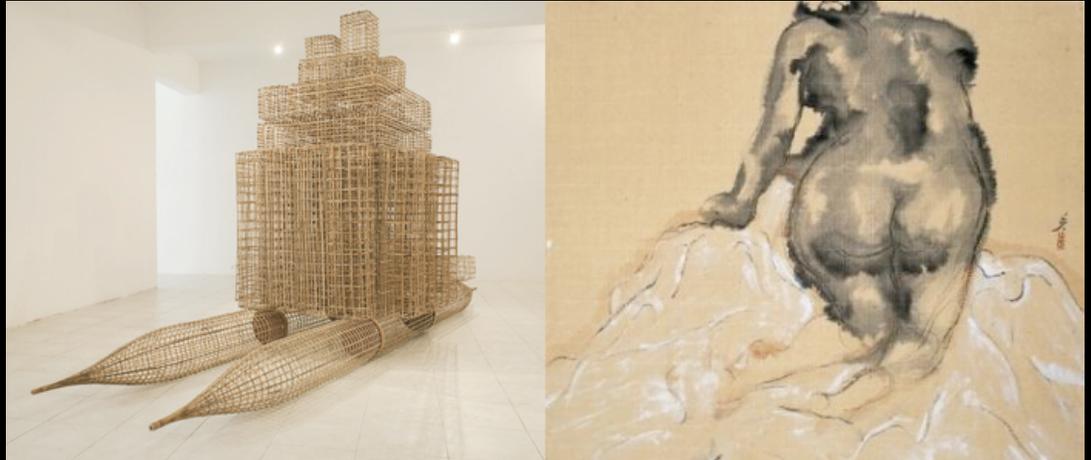
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## EDITOR'S LETTER

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## 8 ASIAN ARTISTS TO WATCH

With artists like Takashi Murakami and Anish Kapoor leading the way, the world has its eyes firmly fixed on Asia's emerging artistic talent. By Alanna Lynott



In celebration of the Saatchi Gallery's Indian 'Empire Strikes Back' exhibition, and Anish Kapoor's recent critically acclaimed Royal Academy show, we take a closer look at Asia's top artists.

**Ai Weiwei** is a Chinese sculptor, social commentator and activist. A svengali of the Chinese art world, he's feted as "China's equivalent of Andy Warhol," and his sculptures possess a fascinating grace. He gained attention in the west after his collaboration with Herzog & de Meuron on Beijing's 'bird nest' Olympic stadium, although he is an outspoken critic of Chinese policy: Weiwei's poet father was exiled to a labour camp during the Cultural Revolution.

**Nguyen Thanh Binh**, a Vietnamese painter, finds his inspiration in classical music, Japanese Haiku and Tang dynasty poetry. Beautiful nudes and graceful dancers are rendered in a characteristically limited palette of whites, greys and reds, while his use of space accentuates the figures: "The aim in my work is to condense the narrative," Thanh Binh says. "There are never a lot of people in my paintings. I like minimal subject and maximum idea."

**Cao Fei** is based in Beijing, where she produces beautifully vibrant photographs, videos and installations. Her influences include avatars, pop music, computer games, Japanese Manga and Hong Kong films. Described as "one of the pre-eminent Chinese artists of her generation," she is fascinated by virtual media, such as Second Life and the contrast it provides between urban reality and fantasy-perfect utopia.

**Lei Zi Ren** is emerging as a hot tip on the international art scene. His paintings explore the invisible bonds between men and women, expressing modern aesthetics in a traditional way. Moving between conventional ink and wash line drawings, and more contemporary oils, Zi Ren manages to retain an intriguing child-like naivety and subtlety in his work that few artists successfully achieve.

**Ronald Ventura** has just enjoyed his first solo exhibition in the USA, where his work was described as "a compelling and provocative statement about contemporary life". Ventura combines dark images with brighter styles such as cartoons and graffiti, and the subsequent complex layering acts as a metaphor for the multifaceted national identity of the Ventura's native Philippines.

**Sopheap Pich** is a Cambodian sculptor who utilises materials that are easily accessible in his home country, such as rattan, bamboo and metal wire. His art concerns itself with the complex economic and social transitions which Cambodia is now undergoing. Unusually, many of his works depict human organs such as lungs and stomachs reflecting the health problems suffered by Cambodians after the Pol Pot repression.

**Hiroshi Sugimoto** is best known for his highly stylized photographic works depicting seascapes, movie theatres, waxworks and Buddhist sculptures. His images show influences of Dadaism and Surrealism, and reflect his lifelong admiration for the works of Marcel Duchamp. Also an accomplished architect, Sugimoto admits he tries "to never be satisfied. This way I will always be challenging my spirit".

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