

# Tatler

POWER & PURPOSE | PHILANTHROPY

## Meet the Hong Kong charity using art to improve the well-being of children in the city

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**COVER** 'The recycle of materialistic perspective' by Dinar Sultana Putul (Photo: courtesy of the Sovereign Art Foundation)

**Tatler speaks to The Sovereign Art Foundation at the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the organisation's Asian Art Prize, which auctions works from artists around the region and fundraises for Hong Kong children in need**

**T**his month, the Hong Kong-based charity Sovereign Art Foundation (SAF), which promotes Asian art around the world, held a gala to honour winners of its Sovereign Asian Art Prize.



Held annually, the prize—which celebrates its 20th anniversary this year—works with artists around the region; their works are auctioned off at the gala dinner, with the proceeds divided between the artists and the organisation’s Make It Better (MIB) programme. The proceeds go towards art workshops aimed at improving the well-being of vulnerable children and communities in the Asia Pacific region.

*Tatler* speaks to Tiffany Pinkstone, co-founder and director of SAF, to learn more about the MIB programme, which supports children, their primary caretakers as well as educators from disadvantaged communities in Hong Kong.



**ABOVE** Tiffany Pinkstone, co-founder and director of the Sovereign Art Foundation, believes in the benefits of art to improve people’s mental well-being (Photo: courtesy of the Sovereign Art Foundation)

### **Tell us about the Sovereign Asian Art Prize.**

We get nominators—who are independent curators—from all over the Asia Pacific region, covering Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand as well as Central Asia and the Middle East. The nominators recommend who they think are the best artists. We contact those artists, let them know they’ve been nominated and invite them to enter the art prize and submit three pieces each.

Separate from the nominators, we've got an international panel of independent judges. Our chair judge is art curator David Elliot, who's worked with us for many years. We also have other judges—some of them winners from previous years—who we rotate every couple of years to help us select the top 30 finalists to be exhibited in Hong Kong. Then, we have our gala dinner where we present the grand prize winner with US\$30,000.



**ABOVE** Sameen Agha, from Pakistan, the 2024 grand prize winner (Photo: courtesy of the Sovereign Art Foundation)



**ABOVE** "Home is A Terrible Place to Love" by Sameen Agha (Photo: courtesy of the Sovereign Art Foundation)

### **How do you engage the public with contemporary art?**

When we started the foundation 20 years ago, there was so little in Hong Kong on the art scene—literally a handful of galleries on Hollywood Road in terms of contemporary art. And so we thought about bringing the arts to the people. We had our first exhibition at Pacific Place, and set up a public vote prize. Everybody that came through the exhibition would get a voting form and could choose their favourite. And it's funny seeing how they change their interaction with the exhibition. Suddenly when you ask them to choose, they really change.

### **How do you fundraise?**

The SAF keeps the first prize and auctions the other 29 finalists at the gala dinner. We give respective artists 50 per cent of the sales—what a gallery would usually give them. We felt that it was more sustainable to give the artists something rather than just rely on donations year in and year out—it encourages them to put their best work forward. It's also our main annual fundraising for our MIB programme.



**Tell us about the MIB programme.**

MIB is something that we came up with about ten years ago. By that point, we had been funding all these art programmes around Southeast Asia, so we thought: why don't we do something in Hong Kong? We send art therapists out into different schools and community centres in Hong Kong. They run expressive arts workshops for children with special educational needs (SEN) and those coming from disadvantaged or vulnerable backgrounds.



**ABOVE** Demet, from the Philippines, 2024 Public Vote Prize winner (Photo: courtesy of the Sovereign Art Foundation)



**ABOVE** "PPE, Paint Palette Emulation" by Demet (Photo: courtesy of the Sovereign Art Foundation)

**How do disadvantaged communities in Hong Kong benefit from MIB?**

Since launching MIB, we've also run workshops for teachers, social workers and primary caregivers—where we work with mothers directly. And the first thing that was impactful was how these ladies suddenly turned around and went, "Well, I didn't realise there were other women in my situation," and that's really quite comforting—to meet one another that way. These workshops focus on the mother; some of them might have even two or three children, some with SEN—there's definitely no time for your own time.

A lot of these women also can't work, because all their time is spent looking after their children, so they're on government assistance. We try to get them to understand how important it is to focus on themselves—you need to be able to look after yourself in order to be able to look after your family. We run the workshops at a time when the kids are in school, or we might even run a separate workshop to look after the kids while the mothers focus on themselves.

### **Do you have a favourite workshop?**

We run these sessions where we would bring the kids with the mums together. So it's about building tools so that they can also communicate better together. One of the things we do is "messy play". This is one of the greatest things that I think we do; it is so simple: we let them come in, we set a big table with paints and everybody can just mess around with the paint.

And I tell you, that release is quite incredible. Firsthand as a parent, as soon as my kids bring the paints out, you just know it's going to be really messy. But suddenly, when you've got nothing holding you back and there's no inhibitions—for a child to witness their mother become childlike—it's incredible.

