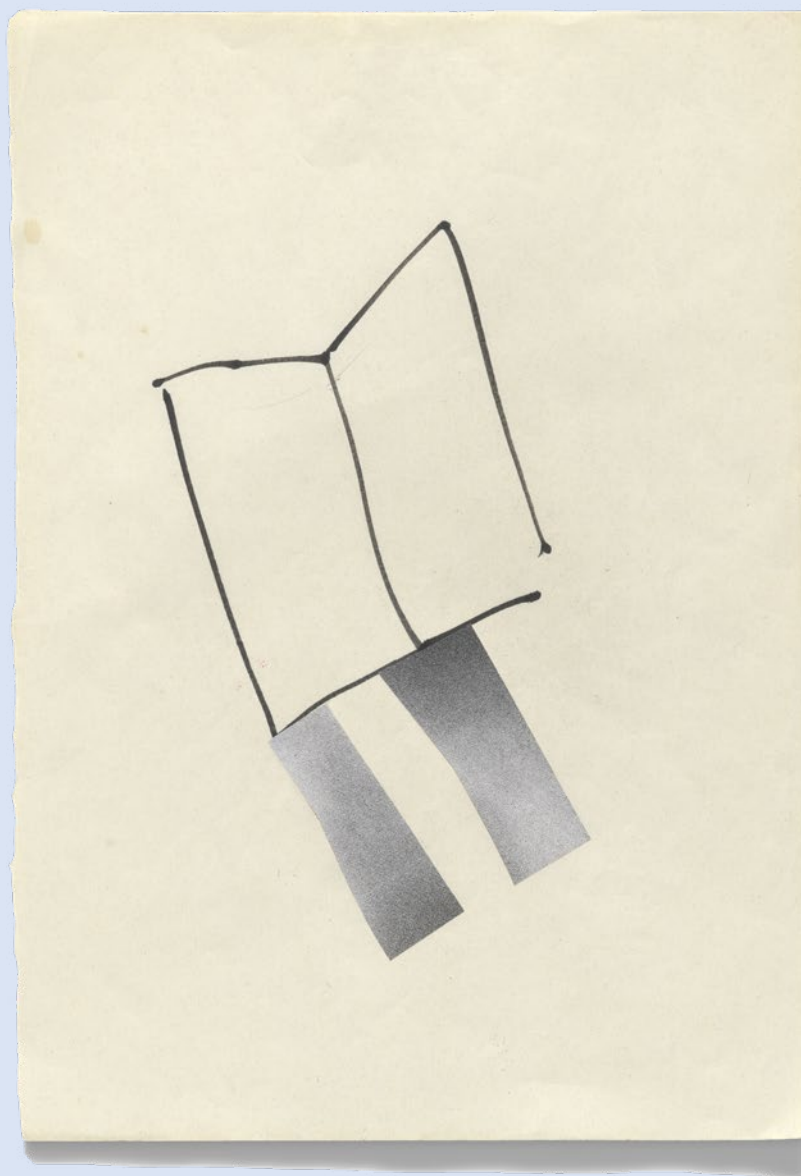




DRAWING CONNECTIONS:

A Conversation with Olivia Shao and Monique Burger

ISABELLA FÜRNKÄS, *Insomnia Drawing*,
#0175, 2007–, 25.5 × 17.5 cm. Copyright
the artist. Photo by Philipp Hitz. Courtesy
the Burger Collection, Hong Kong.

BY ANNIE OCHMANEK

"Form, Shadow, Motion: Selections from the Burger Collection," an exhibition featuring works from the 1960s to today, will open at The Drawing Center in New York in October before traveling to the Asia Society Hong Kong Center in March 2027. Making cross-cultural connections between artists from Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and the US, the show draws on themes of historical time, memory, and erasure, as well as diasporic displacement and exchange. In the following conversation, the exhibition's curator Olivia Shao, and Monique Burger, co-founder of the Burger Collection, discuss "Form, Shadow, Motion" together with art historian Annie Ochmanek.

ANNIE OCHMANEK *Olivia, what were some of the starting points for this exhibition? What ideas or throughlines shaped your selections?*

OLIVIA SHAO It has been thrilling to delve into such a personal, inspiring collection. Monique and her team have been so supportive and generous throughout the entire process. It began with a close, comprehensive exploration of the collection—approaching each work with the idea that no stone would be left unturned. Several themes began to emerge between the artworks, and I started researching each of the artists' practices and histories more deeply. It was also a privilege to spend time with Monique looking at the works in person in Zurich—it was like time travel, hearing her stories and memories connected to each piece, and what first drew her to them.

AO *The exhibition is drawn entirely from the Burger Collection. In that sense, this project combines both of your curatorial viewpoints and is a form of collaboration. Monique, what principles tend to guide your collecting approach?*

MONIQUE BURGER It's mostly about falling in love with objects and ideas. Once that happens, I'm always keen to collect an artist's work in depth and see how their practice evolves. There are a lot of connections between artists in the collection. Some of them happened naturally; others were carefully planned, in terms of conceptual or other kinds of links that you really only see if someone as thoughtful as Olivia is given the chance to work them out, establish new ties, and undo others. I want to keep our collection dynamic and open. That's also why we have a website that functions like an archive.

AO *Olivia, your exhibitions have often drawn on literary or interdisciplinary sources for their conceptual basis. Are there any particular texts or concepts you have been thinking with recently?*

OS The exhibition explores Eastern thought and Western philosophy as a starting point, while also using Hong Kong and New York as points of reference and departure, and responding to the physical location of the exhibition spaces—The Drawing Center in New York and the Asia Society in Hong Kong.

I admire the writing of Yuk Hui, who compares so-called Eastern and Western philosophical approaches

in relation to art, technology, and culture. His book *Art and Cosmotechnics* (2021) is a source of inspiration, as well as Heidegger's televised 1963 interview with a Buddhist monk named Bhikku Maha Mani, which centers around the tensions, similarities, and differences between their modes of thinking. Heidegger's writing has been of interest for years; he's also one of the few Western philosophers who have acknowledged Eastern thought.

AO *For The Drawing Center's catalog, you have also invited certain thinkers and writers to respond to the show.*

OS As in the exhibition, the publication highlights a range of layered voices. There's a wonderful text from Johannes Hoerning, which focuses on specific works, philosophy, and his close relationship to Monique, whereas Chris Wan, head of gallery and exhibitions at Asia Society and my collaborator, has an insightful text on the featured Hong Kong artists. Brian Kuan Wood has written on his impressions of the exhibition and the relationships between the works.

AO *How else do you see the project bridging New York and Hong Kong, or what relationships do you hope to trace between the two cities? How will the exhibitions differ?*

MB It's going to be interesting to see the public's reaction in each location. Both institutions have entirely different histories and audiences, so even if some of the works are included in both locations, they will feel very different and assume new meanings. A prison-window drawing by Robert Gober shown in New York, where most people know him, will mean very different things to visitors in Greater China—probably even in Asia as a whole—where he is unknown and has never had a solo presentation. The landscape ink works by Koon Wai Bong, on the other hand, are familiar to a Hong Kong audience, but people in New York might be encountering them for the first time. These possibilities of discovery are really exciting. Olivia's attentive selection of works will certainly generate confluences between artists, bringing out their shared humanity and love for things they didn't know they had in common.

OS I agree with Monique. It will be interesting to observe and engage with the artworks and their reception in both

cities. As Monique mentioned, while there are distinct differences in context and history across the two cities, there are also strong resonances and a real opportunity for connection and dialogue.

As for how the two exhibitions will compare, the layout and architecture of each gallery are very different. At Asia Society, the Chantal Miller Gallery is larger, with five chambers that are intimate and can hold more installations and sculptures. There will be 11 additional works in that iteration. The Drawing Center show will focus more on drawing, works on paper, and the motif of the line.

AO You mentioned the particular perspective of The Drawing Center, which I've always found to be a productive lens. Focusing on artists' works on paper and drawing-based practices can access those artists' thought processes but also illuminate the limits of representation. How does that framework inform this project?

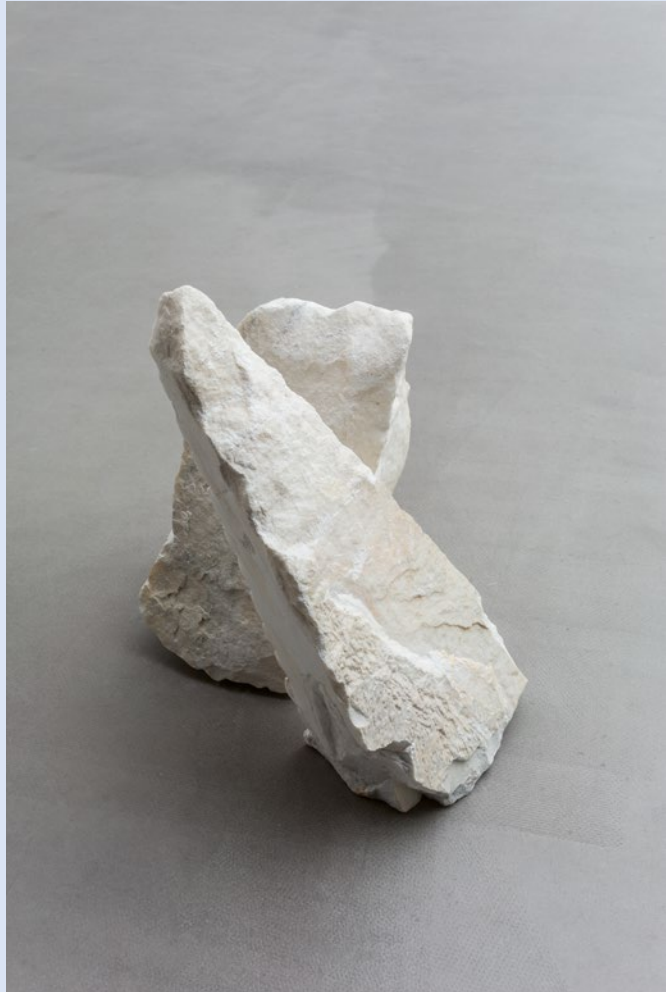
OS It's fascinating what a drawing can be—it doesn't have to be literal. Within this exhibition, there are many works that cross several disciplines. Whether it's drawing, collage, painting, sculpture, or film, all are seen as forms of mark-making. Bringing up these questions and pushing limits is a good place to be. Some examples include Franz West's *Maulschelle* (c. 1980), which is a mixed-media drawing incorporating papier-mâché, with beautiful linework, while in a 16mm film by Filipa César, the natural landscapes she captures have characteristics reminiscent of a drawing in graphite with half-tones and shading.

AO It seems that several works in this show also have an enigmatic, conceptualist strain.

OS Yes, Tozer Pak Sheung Chuen engages with the invisible and continues within a lineage of global conceptualism and performance; his attention to everyday practices and gestures, subtle acts of refusal, and modes of experimentation draw me to his work. Cao Yu also explores these methods in her performance, questioning the body, the everyday, and our shared condition. Her work featured in the exhibition, *The World is Like This for Now* (2017), comprises two large blocks of marble bound with an almost invisible long strand of hair; it is a sensitive and frail reminder of the transience of human existence.

AO I also noticed a theme of books, or pages, throughout the checklist, combined with an absence of text in the actual artworks. What role do language and translation play in this show?

OS The absence of words becomes a powerful means of thinking about the opening of space, the exploration and possibilities of emptiness. In terms of historical references, I return to Stéphane Mallarmé's 1897 revolutionary poem *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (*A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance*), as well as to *shanshui* painting. In both cases, forms of representation are being used to evoke vastness of space.



CAO YU, *The World is Like This for Now*, 2017, long hair (the artist's own), marble, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist and the Burger Collection, Hong Kong.



FRANZ WEST, *Maulschelle*,
c. 1980, mixed media, 60 × 13 × 8 cm.
Copyright Archiv Franz West; Estate
Franz West; and Arndt & Partner,
Berlin. Photo by Jon Etter. Courtesy
the Burger Collection, Hong Kong.

FILIPA CÉSAR, *Insert/Memograma*,
2010, 16mm transferred to HD, black
and white, no sound: 10 min; HD,
color, sound: 30 min. Copyright the
artist. Courtesy the Burger Collection,
Hong Kong.





ISABELLA FÜRNKÄS, *Insomnia*
Drawing, #0011, 2007–, mixed media
on paper, 25.5 × 17.5 cm. Copyright the
artist. Photo by Philipp Hitz. Courtesy
the Burger Collection, Hong Kong.



ROBERT GOBER, *Untitled*, 2020, graphite
and colored pencil on found drawing,
18 × 21 cm. Copyright the artist. Courtesy
the Burger Collection, Hong Kong.

AO Monique, you have been based in Hong Kong for many years now. How would you say contemporary art in Hong Kong has changed over recent decades? What are the pressing issues facing its institutions or its discourses today, in your view?

MB I have been based in Hong Kong for more than 20 years, and it has changed so much when it comes to the arts! A lot of it is thanks to the work M+ is doing by tracing the complex histories of the region. It was a tremendous time when I served on the M+ board, and I learned a lot about the challenges of engaging local audiences and sponsors, and what it means to build a museum from scratch. I think one of the most pressing concerns for institutions has to do with building up the next generation of supporters. Hong Kong is a very wealthy city, but a lot of the younger generation—whose parents might have been patrons of the arts—seem to only have a small amount of interest in following their trajectory. That's a global phenomenon, and the same is happening in Europe. Young people who are fortunate enough to put time and money into the support of cultural production need to find their own voice and meaning, but a museum has to find a way to nurture them, just like it nurtures its own curators, artists, and exhibition-makers.

AO Hong Kong is clearly established as a market hub for contemporary art, but perhaps not as widely recognized as it should be as a center for artistic production. It seems important to your approach that you counter this perception by supporting artistic production at a local level.

MB We have been supporting a lot of graduate exhibitions at local universities—that's one of the best places to spot young talents and nurture them. The same is true of local galleries that are doing a really important job in giving younger artists their first show.

OS Empty Gallery, Blindspot Gallery, Gallery EXIT, Kiang Malingue, Antenna Space, and Para Site, to name a few, are some spaces that have really helped to bring artists from Hong Kong and Asia to a more global audience.

AO The scope of artists in the show is quite global. In working with the Burger Collection, were there discoveries for you, Olivia?

OS There have been many! Monique's curiosity and openness are inspiring, and her attentiveness to artistic practice is reflected in the care for and precision of the collection. I'm struck by how each work is chosen with intention—how personal and considered the collection feels. She has a singular perspective and exquisite eye, which is rare. Some of the artists were familiar to me at the outset, but working with the collection allowed for a deeper engagement with their practices. However, in the case of an artist such as Koon Wai Bong—an ink painter based between Taiwan and Hong Kong—I was encountering the work for the first time. When I saw his painting *Seaside at Night* (2012) in Zurich, I was blown away by its richness. It's not very large, but it holds something expansive that can't be put into words. Similarly, Isabella Färnkäs was introduced to

me by Monique, and it was wonderful to connect with her. Drawing is central to Färnkäs's practice, and her ongoing series of insomnia drawings is both surprising and compelling—at once surreal, humorous, and psychologically attuned.

AO Since its development, the Burger Collection has worked with many different curators and institutions. How would you characterize what sets this particular project apart?

MB My approach to collecting and to working with people and institutions is highly personal. The ideas and projects that my husband and I support always grow out of a relationship that starts with a conversation, a dinner, a studio visit. We've been champions of The Drawing Center for many years, and the beautiful curatorial work Laura Hoptman and her team have been doing there just kept inspiring us. What is so special about this project is that it is linked to a full-time curatorial position we support at The Drawing Center. Olivia's work and approach speak very much to the way we see art, and the ways in which it has shaped our lives: in between cultures, beyond borders, entirely undogmatic.

When I brought Olivia to our collection storage for the first time in 2024, my team pulled out the works that she wanted to see as potential checklist items for her show. Many of these I had not seen in years, even decades, and when we stood in front of around 100 or so works—drawings, paintings, installations, videos—her vision shone through. It's hard to put into words, but there was this fragility, delicacy, and intimacy to each work that only got stronger when they were in each other's company. I love how she activates our collection, and many of the artists are very excited to be put into new contexts.

This conversation will appear in an expanded form in the exhibition catalog, Drawing Papers 163: Form, Shadow, Motion: Selections from the Burger Collection (The Drawing Center, 2026).

OLIVIA SHAO is the Burger Collection & TOY Meets Art curator at The Drawing Center in New York. She has also organized exhibitions and projects at independent spaces, galleries, and institutions in New York and Los Angeles, as well as across Europe and Asia.

MONIQUE BURGER and Max Burger established the Burger Collection in the late 1990s, which encompasses a wide range of works, including Euro-American, Indian, and Asian art. Burger Collection is a patron, supporter, and friend of many institutions and museums worldwide. Monique Burger serves on the advisory committee for Asia Society in Hong Kong and New York. She was a board member at M+ (2018–24), at Asia Art Archive in Hong Kong (2008–16), and a member of the board at the Swiss Institute in New York (2018–26). Selected institutions and their projects—such as Hamburger Bahnhof – Nationalgalerie der Gegenwart, Berlin; Hayward Gallery, London; HART HAUS, Hong Kong; Kunstmuseum Basel, Basel; Para Site, Hong Kong; NXTHVN, New Haven; and many more—have been supported through the collaboration between the Burger Collection and “Thinking of You” (TOY).

ANNIE OCHMANEK holds a PhD in art history from Columbia University. Her writings have appeared in exhibition catalogs for the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York; Kunsthalle Wien, Austria; Z33, Hasselt; Buffalo AKG Art Museum, New York; and The Drawing Center, New York; as well as in magazines such as *May Revue* and *Artforum*. A former curatorial assistant at MoMA, and former associate editor of *Artforum*, Ochmanek was co-editor of the October Files volume on Donald Judd (The MIT Press, 2021).