

# The way to WOW

New Zealand's wearable art extravaganza stages its first overseas show in Hong Kong, with works by local student designers, writes Sue Green

**H**ernaceae has a crab claw on one arm and a long crayfish tail. Its carapace is a jacket created from small pieces of fabric sewn to a backing; its head, a helmet made from papier-mâché and fabric, while that tail is more papier-mâché formed with wire. Meet one of the whimsical creations of New Zealand's *World of WearableArt* (WoW).

Two years in the making, its inspiration was the seaside home of its creator, Jan Kerr, who lives on the Kapiti coast, north of the New Zealand capital, Wellington. Hernaceae – that's a combination of hermit crab and crustacean – encapsulates all that is WoW.

On January 28, Hernaceae will go on show with another 120 pieces of wearable art in a 70-minute performance that is part of the Hong Kong Arts Festival. What started in 1987 as a bit of fun to promote an art gallery in WoW founder Suzie Moncrieff's hometown of Nelson, at the top of New Zealand's South Island, has morphed into a sophisticated stage show playing to 50,000 people from New Zealand and around the world in Wellington every September. Its annual design competition also has contestants competing for prizes of up to NZ\$25,000 (about HK\$152,000) and – more importantly for many – exposure on this world stage.

For the Hong Kong show, there will be 10 pieces created by students from the Hong Kong Design Institute. "They were not in the WoW competition, but we went and had a look at them and they are amazing," says WoW artistic director Malia Johnston, who was in Hong Kong last autumn. "They have been doing it as part of their course work."

This will be the first time WoW organisers are staging a full show outside New Zealand. It resulted from arts festival executive director Tisa Ho's enthusiasm for the

extravaganza when she saw it last year. For Moncrieff, who now describes herself as a "guide" to Johnston, it is a dream come true as she's always wanted to find the show an international audience.

But touting the production is, she says, a massive undertaking, with not just the costumes being sent here, but also 10 dancers and 15 models, props and sets and three arms of the five-arm, octopus-like revolving stage that allows the performers to get close to the audience.

Johnston, who has been with WoW for 11 years, calls the logistics "crazy". During her last visit, she chose 20 local dancers and 18 models to work with the cast from New Zealand. She will have two weeks to train them in Hong Kong. "It will be done very fast, but we will have all the material done so it is just a process of transferring the information," she says. "The people we have picked are fantastic and I am sure that they will pick it up quickly."

It makes sense for the show to go global. Over the past 24 years, 4,500 WoW garments have been created, NZ\$1 million in prize money handed out, almost 350,000 people have

seen the show and it now involves a cast and crew of more than 400.

For Kerr, victory with Hernaceae, which won this year's open section and the Weta award, chosen by Weta Workshop head Richard Taylor (whose company did movie effects for the *Lord of the Rings* series), led to the chance to work with his internationally renowned creative workshop, pivotal to movies such as the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. In New Zealand and around the world – entries have come from 23 countries, including Korea, Fiji, India, Alaska, China, Thailand, Australia, Britain and the Netherlands – artists, designers, architects, and home sewers, their sewing machines chugging away, have concocted their amazing confections in the hope of making it into the show.

"It is very accessible, that is what makes it different," says Moncrieff. "I have been doing it for about 10 years," says Kerr. "It is the process of getting a piece onto the stage. It is a way of creating that nothing else really offers you. You can create a piece that can go onstage and be modelled, exhibited.

"I enjoy the making, but it is a love-hate relationship, you could hurl it out the window at any minute and then you stand back and look at it and you think, 'that looks cool!'"

The show moved from Nelson to Wellington in 2005 – a sore point with Nelson's people, although the town retains the WoW Museum, from which most of the "best of" costumes to show in Hong Kong will come, along with highlights of this year's show.

The museum offers a chance to get close to the costumes, their details and the bizarre array of construction materials. One of the things that make WoW so different and fascinating is the materials used, and the emphasis on recycling. They range from the expected – paper, fabric, wire and plastics – to the



unusual, such as fish skin, old milk bottles and teaspoons. Moncrieff says the most memorable are an entry made from recycled knitting needles in shades of grey – "they were used to make an exceptionally beautiful sculptural shape," she says – and one comprising aluminium pipes. "When the model danced in it, it flicked the light."

Canadian Lynn Christiansen, who abandoned corporate marketing to go to art school in San Francisco, has used brown silicone to make chocolate-look dresses, and textured, cut and shaped sheet metal to create a garment inspired by a thorny devil lizard.

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JAN KERR, CREATOR OF WOW

Artist and former New Zealand member of parliament Mike Ward mixed canvases, papier-mâché and paint with curtain lace in creating his 2011 entry, *Yes Dear ... A Pas De Deux*, which sees a bridegroom as mere accessory. It will be in the Hong Kong performance.

The show will open with a South Pacific section, including Maori music and a performance by New Zealand opera singer Alvale Cole. Then comes the children's section, with local child models, featuring a flying book which opens to reveal a real-life scene. Johnston says the creative

excellence section features the "wildest garments, the most unique, outlandish pieces, that's the crazy section" while this year's open section is a celebration of colour, "simple but beautiful, based on a dance piece that stays in the centre for the whole time, with colours exposed as the women in the middle take off the layers of their dresses".

The avant garde is where "fashion meets art", and the works by the Hong Kong students will feature in this category. Also in Hong Kong will be one of the most popular sections: glow-in-the-dark garments shown with the lights down. It is a highlight, fun, colourful, looks great, but does not translate with the intricacies of creation and unusual materials.

It is a significant frustration that mostly, as the garments whir by, there is no way of knowing what they are made of or how, except by constantly consulting the text and tiny pictures in the programme. Save money by ignoring the programme seller and you won't have a clue what is going on.

It's a criticism Moncrieff knows well, but she rejects any notion that a commentary would make it like a fashion show and it certainly is not, she says, adding WoW is more a theatrical experience.

"It is a theatre of the many layers with big dance performances, amazing sets, inspiring lighting and a musical soundtrack. It is an emotional roller coaster that continues to be full of surprises and showcases extraordinary art-inspired costumes from all over the world. It is a big stage show."

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*World of WearableArt*, Jan 29-Feb 5, Star Hall, Kowloon Bay International Trade and Exhibition Centre. HK\$160, HK\$250, HK\$360 (students HK\$90, HK\$125, HK\$175) HK Ticketing: Inquiries: 3128 8288



Storybook characters the King and Queen come to life



**Choice characters** include (clockwise from far left): *A Bid for Freedom* by Kate Hellyar (NZ); *Breakfast by Madhumbanti Ghosh and Suvankar Pramanick* (India); *Victus Libri (Who Needs Computer Games)* by Jane Ewers (NZ); *Punk Bird Family* by Sean Purucker (US); and *You Don't Bring Me Flowers* by Catherine Anderson (NZ). Photos: World of Wearableart



**PREVIEW**

**Memory and Fiction**  
Blindspot Gallery  
Jan 11 to Feb 4

During the 1960s and 90s, when nothing was going to get in the way of progress in this city, least of all a few derelict old buildings, Wong Wo-bik went to a number of historical landmarks that were soon to be torn down and took photos.

Her mission wasn't so much to document history as to capture, and sometimes reinvent, stories behind these places she visited.

"Today, we talk a lot about preserving our collective memory, but that wasn't my intention then," the photographer says. "My interest was in the architecture of some of these historical buildings and the stories behind the people who owned these deceptive properties."

A selection of photographs that Wong took over three decades, including images of long-gone places such as Lai Yuen Amusement Park and the caste-like family mansions of businessman Eu Tong Sen, will go on show at Blindspot Gallery in Central this week.

The retrospective is inspired by a book on Wong's work (*Hong Kong/China Photographers Four - Wong Wo Bik*) that was published by Asia One in 2009. Wong is one of the founding members of the Hong Kong Photo Festival and has been a museum adviser to the Leisure and Cultural Services Department since 1996. However, her works are not

historical records as some of the photographs have been subtly altered and manipulated.

"The Chinese for 'fabrication' is very negative; it suggests that something is fake or insincere," says Wong. "However, I think by adding layers onto an image, it enriches the work; it also makes the viewers think: what is real? What is unreal? I think I have always been greatly influenced by *Last Year in Marienbad* [a French movie classic from 1961], which is a crossover between reality and fantasy."

Wong left Hong Kong in 1975 to study in the US. She received her bachelor of fine art degree in sculpture and printmaking from the Columbus College of Art and Design in Ohio in 1977, and then a master's in photography from the Tyler School of Art, Temple University, in 1979. She returned in 1980 to find a city undergoing transformation.

"I used to take strolls in the Mid-Levels to look at abandoned properties. Some of the architecture up was fascinating as it revealed something about the people who used to live there and, perhaps, how they led their lives. There must have been lots of stories about these people. My photographs are attempts to retail and even reinvent some of these stories."

*Kevin Kuong*

24-26A, Aberdeen Street, Central, Tue-Sat, 11am-7pm (closed on public holidays). Inquiries: 2517 6238



**Hong Kong International Chamber Music Festival 2012 - Experience the Passion with Cho-Liang Lin!**

**Sponsored Feature**



Before the days of the Internet, karaoke, or even records, people enjoyed music the old fashioned way: by participating in the making of it. Chamber music was in the 19th century what television was in the 20th century; it pulled the family together. Even though those days are gone, music-making at its finest has never gone out of fashion, and chamber music is once again growing in awareness and popularity. Hong Kong is now home to a high caliber chamber music festival thanks to the annual Hong Kong International Chamber Music Festival (HKICMF) presented by Premiere Performances of Hong Kong (PPHK), coming this January 11th-19th, 2012.

Returning as Title Sponsor of the HKICMF is Bank of America Merrill Lynch (BAML). "Our partnership with the Hong Kong International Chamber Music Festival highlights our commitment to arts and culture in the region," said Brian J. Brille, President of Bank of America Merrill



Andreas Heaflinger (piano)

Lynch Asia Pacific. "We are delighted that through this event we have the opportunity to bring world class classical music performances to Hong Kong. "Now in its 3rd year, the International Chamber Music Festival is a significant event that greatly enhances the level of arts and culture in Hong Kong, and we are both proud and privileged to participate in this very worthy cause," said Duncan Palmer, Managing Director of The Langham, Hong Kong, which will also provide ticketholders a special meal discount in their hotel restaurants from January 11th-31st. Equally enthusiastic in supporting the Festival are Hongkong Land who is sponsoring two free community concerts (18:00, January 13th & 17th) and hosting a display about the Festival in the Rounda, Exchange Square (January 4th-20th), and Italian menswear brand Pal Zileri which will provide concert tuxedos to some of the star musicians.

PPHK's Executive Director, Andrea Fessler, believes that Hong Kong audiences will appreciate chamber music if they are given the opportunities to hear world class performances by world class performers. This begins by choosing the right person to head this endeavour, and this year, she

has indeed found a most suitable person in the internationally acclaimed violinist Cho-Liang Lin, who will act as Artist Director for the festival for the first time. In addition to being an active soloist and chamber music player on the international stage, Lin has been Music Director of La Jolla Music Society Summerfest since 2001, turning the event into a multi-faceted bonanza that encompasses, in addition to chamber music, dance, jazz, new music, etc. His experience seems to have been reflected well in the programming of the HKICMF.

There are six concerts that encompass the widest spectrum possible. The opening concert of the festival, "*Virioso Passions*" (20:00 January 11th, City Hall Concert Hall) promises to launch the festival with a bang, pitting the Italians against the Argentinians, with music by Vivaldi and Piazolla. Each of the four



Shanghai Quartet

for "*Modern Masters*" (20:00 January 15th, HKAPA Jockey Club Amphitheatre) that showcases, among other works by modern composers in the East and West, Tan Dun's multi-media *Ghost Opera* - and Tan Dun himself will come to town to direct that performance (as well as give a pre-concert talk with Cho-Liang Lin that is free for ticketholders). There is an interesting mix of repertoire in "*Paris*

and Shanghai" (20:00 January 18th, City Hall Theatre) which highlights harp and vocal music from romantic French masters like Saint-Saëns, Chausson, Franck, Debussy and Ravel, in addition to old melodies from Shanghai! "*Rush Hour Concert*" (19:00 City Hall Theatre) is a mini-programme of violin sonatas by Mozart and Brahms performed by two up and coming artists Henning Kraegerud and Shai Wosner, which is the perfect length and time for younger audiences. As if that is not enough, there is an extensive outreach programme to help cultivate chamber music in the community with free concerts around town and educational opportunities for young musicians in the form of open rehearsals, workshops and masterclasses.

Lin will be surrounded by some of the most notable names around town and abroad, performers of the calibre of the Shanghai Quartet, Huang Ying (soprano), Ning Feng (violin), Gary Hoffman (cello), Andreas Heaflinger (piano) and Marina Pochini (flute) will be spending almost two weeks in Hong Kong performing in the Festival. Local celebrities include the great virtuoso Wang Di-Yuen, three members of the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra (Richard Bamping (cello), Andrew Ling (violin) and Zhu Bei (violin)) and the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts Head of Strings Michael Ma (violin). With a lineup of 25 artists performing over the span of nine days - this is the largest festival PPHK has organized to date. The Festival will appeal to amateurs as well as connoisseurs, promising a musical feast that will satisfy the appetite of chamber music aficionados and open the eyes and ears of the general music-loving public.



Gary Hoffman (cello)



Ming Feng (violin)



Ying Huang (soprano)

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Complete festival information can be found in the Festival leaflet distributed at all Unix ticket outlets and on PPHK's website ([www.pp hk.org](http://www.pp hk.org)). Tickets are on sale now at Unix or, for the January 15th performance (Modern Masters), HKTicketing. Prices range from \$150 - \$500 depending on the concert. 50% discount on HK\$150 - \$400 tickets are available for seniors, students and the disabled (limited by quota). Other discounts apply.

Unix ticket enquiry: 27249209 or [www.unix.hk](http://www.unix.hk), HK Ticketing Booking Hotline: 3128-8288 or [www.hkicketing.com](http://www.hkicketing.com) (15 Jan only), Credit Card Booking: 2711 9599, Programme Enquiry: 3518-7290 or [info@pphk.org](mailto:info@pphk.org).