

HONG KONG AND PMQ PROVIDE A STAGE FOR THE 1,600-PANDA TOUR

All the world is a stage. But when the international art world wants to stage something especially amazing, the city of Hong Kong makes for an incredibly dramatic backdrop.

Last year, Dutch artist Florentijn Hofman piqued Hong Kong's interest by floating a giant rubber duck around the harbour. Art Basel opened the same year, and renowned Chinese artist Ju Ming picked Hong Kong as the first stop on his world sculpture tour. And now the city's been invaded by 1,600 papier-mâché pandas.



The purpose of the panda tour, created by French artist Paulo Grangeon and supported by the WWF, is to promote conservation and sustainable development, and raise awareness of this precious endangered species.

These 1,600 pandas - the number still alive in the wild - will tour around Hong Kong, meet residents and visitors at a number of Hong Kong's iconic hot spots, including Avenue of Stars, the Star Ferry and the Shatin Racecourse, and host the opening ceremony for exhibition activities at Hong Kong's latest creative and lifestyle hub, PMQ.

"The project is not just about pandas; it's about conservation and sustainability, which is very much what PMQ is about too," says SK Lam, Creative Director of AllRightsReserved, the panda project's director and the creative brain behind the giant floating Rubber Duck which transfixed Hong Kong's visitors and locals last year.

Just off Hollywood Road in the heart of Hong Kong Island, PMQ held its soft opening in May and has quickly become the edgiest place for some of the coolest local designers to get together with new ideas, and for visitors to check out what's on offer from them.

PMQ was built after the Second World War on the former site of the city's first public school, and for many years housed police officers and their families - the Police Married Quarters. The buildings were renovated under a conservation project

and transformed into a brace of seven-storey blocks, dubbed Staunton and Hollywood, which face each other across a central covered piazza, providing a venue for weekly night markets and special events. Wide open verandas on each floor make for pleasant strolling and boutique browsing, and a bamboo-swathed roof garden links the two blocks, adding a sense of tranquillity.

"This is a unique and incredibly exciting project for Hong Kong," says William To, PMQ's Creative & Programme Director.

"In addition to the great variety of stores, we are hosting a different special exhibition each month, such as the one devoted to French designer Andrée Putman.

"What's really inspiring is that the designers who have come to PMQ are now in day-to-day contact with each other, and that is fostering even more creativity as they get to know each other and interact."

A prime example of PMQ's designer synergy is on daily display at YC, a vibrant atelier that's home to a trio of fashion designers - Yeung Chin, Rachel Chan and Isabel Tong.

"We each put together our own collections. It's not so much about designing for a particular age group or demographic, as an attitude," says Yeung Chin.

"This is a superb space to work in, the rent is very reasonable, and the exposure is excellent. We're all very happy here and think it is going to work well, especially being up close and personal with the public."

There's a great deal of youthful energy flowing around PMQ. Little-known brands and off-the-wall gimmicks ensure surprises on tap and a double portion of entertainment.

PMQ also gets creative when it comes to dining. Aberdeen Street Social is the latest venture for Michelin-starred chef Jason Atherton - a restaurant, cocktail bar and café specialising in modern British cuisine, which also boasts a lovely garden terrace. And taking a walk on the wild side, Fatina & Chefo - Eat & Play is a whimsical eatery with an enticing menu of snacks, savouries and desserts.

Perhaps one of the most attractive aspects of PMQ is that it is next to a residential area, and it's already become a hub for the community. And for anyone who wants to delve a little deeper into PMQ's history, there's a small exhibition hall, as well as regular guided tours of the building's Underground Interpretation Area, which includes part of the original foundation.

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