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Comix Home Base

Hong Kong's comic and animation artists enjoy a purpose-built hub for exhibiting their vintage and contemporary works

Text Tara Lee & Maggie Ng / Images courtesy of Comix Home Base & Dave Chung



Comix Home Base will host a series of events themed on animation and comics until the end of August in celebration of its first anniversary. Since its opening in July last year, it has been an exhibition hub and an exchange centre for Hong Kong's local and international comic artists and animation industry members.

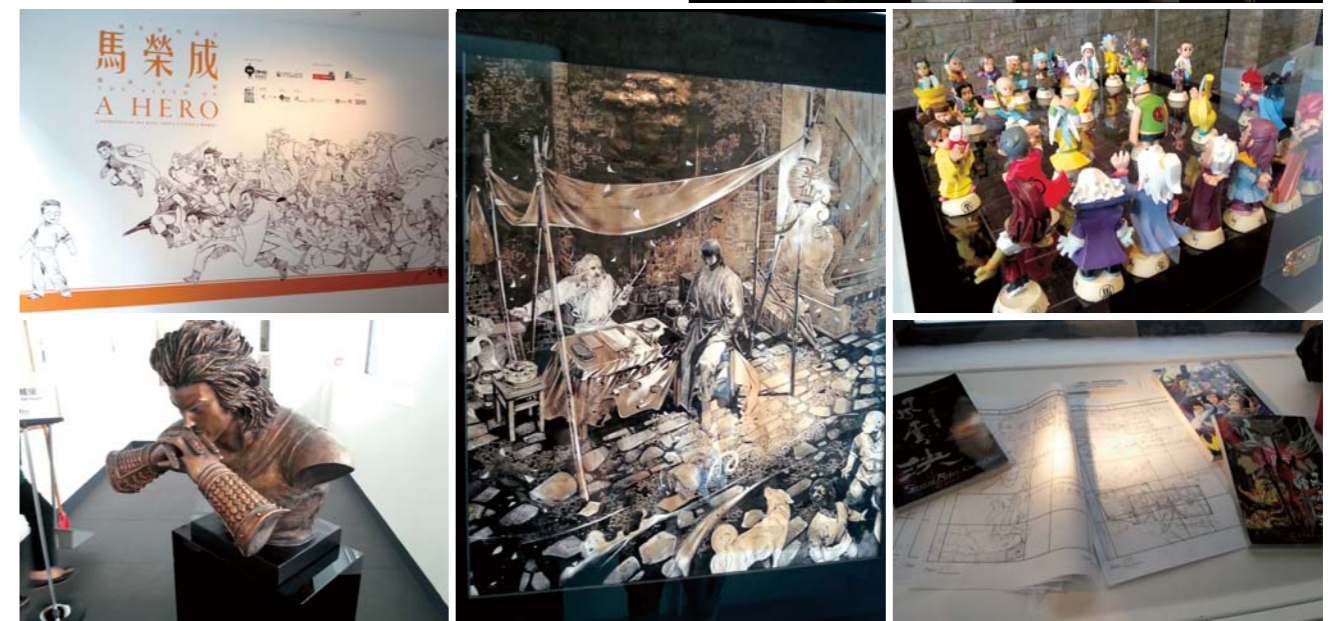
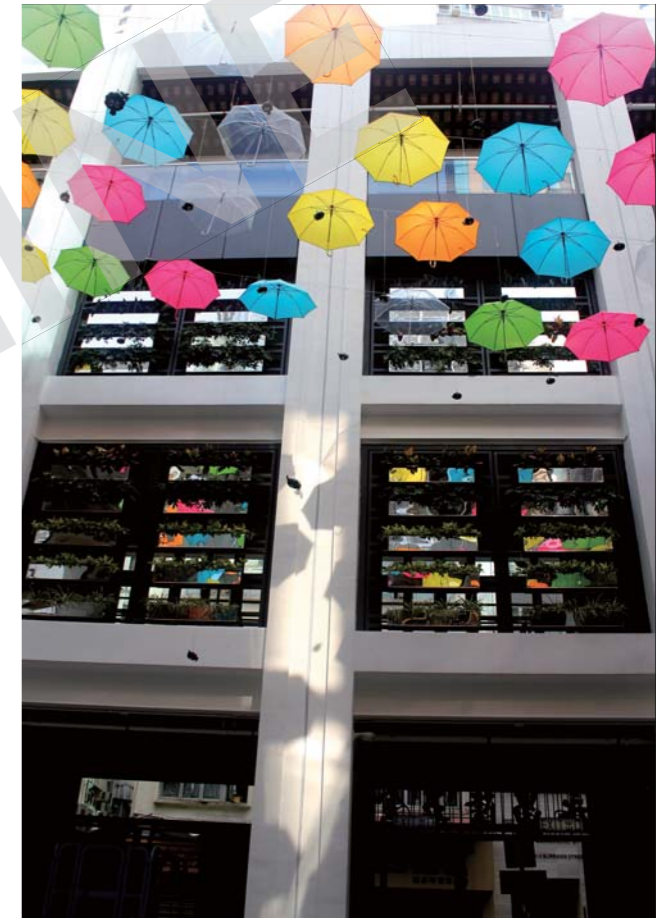


During its first year, Comix Home Base exhibited seminal shows that have charted the evolution of local comics through a wide range of exhibits that include features on comic artists, comic books, artworks and video clips.

In their "Tribute to Masters Series: The Birth Of A Hero", an exhibition of the Comic Works by Ma Wing-shing was presented. Ma Wing-shing is one of Hong Kong's most celebrated comic artists. His comics, *Chinese Hero* and *Storm Riders*, are iconic, and his works have gained a huge audience both in Hong Kong and in the Chinese community living all around the world. This exhibition showed Ma's gift as an artist and his impact as a story-teller on the local creative industry.

The exhibition "Kaleidoscope – History of Hong Kong Comics" retraced the development of local comics and the start of this art form.

The history of comics in Hong Kong dates back to 1911, when Sun Yat-Sen used comics as a medium to distribute anti-Qing propaganda. However, it was during the 1950s and 1960s that Hong Kong comic culture really started to bloom, with the popularity of Hui Guan-Man's Uncle Choi, which addressed the serious theme of Japanese occupation in Hong Kong, and Alfonso Wong's much-loved comedic cartoon *Old Master Q* (Lao Fu Zi).



Comix Home Base

The rise of Hong Kong manhua continued in the 1970s with the action-packed martial arts series *Oriental Heroes* (previously titled *Little Rascals*) through to the '90s with the cute and playful antics of Alice Mak's famous cartoon piglets McMug and McDull becoming the city's counterpart to such international animal characters as Snoopy and Winnie-the-Pooh.

Though influenced by both Western and Japanese comic styles, the content of these illustrated media reveal a distinct local flavour, with references to everyday life and issues relevant to Hong Kong people.

A collaborative project by the Hong Kong Arts Centre and the Urban Renewal Authority, Comix Home Base aims to serve as a platform for Hong Kong's vast comics market, the third largest in the world, while reclaiming the historical architecture it resides in.

Comix Home Base is located in a cluster of pre-war tenement houses on Mallory and Burrows Streets in Wan Chai. In the 1840s, a considerable number of Western settlers lived in the neighbourhood surrounding Spring Garden Lane. Hence the

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four-story building is imbued with local character with a dash of European flavour. Roll tiled roofs originate from traditional Chinese architecture, while the door frames take after the French indoor design.

These tenements were amongst the last handful of old houses that still remain in Wan Chai. These historically significant buildings, with their distinctive vintage details, benefited from the neighbourhood's Urban Renewal Authority revitalization project.

The quaint gift shop at the entrance leads to the courtyard of the Comix Home Base, where visitors can look up and see the classic Hong Kong style cantilevered balconies. Glass frames were added for a modern touch, giving natural lighting perfect for a spontaneous interview with Brian Chan, an associated artist at Comix Home Base.



Chan was born and raised in Hong Kong. He started his career as a comic artist at thirty years of age three years ago. Educated in industrial design, he decided to further his study and obtain a master's degree in interaction design. While industrial design focuses on the visual presentation of a product, interaction design targets to shape the customer's experience in using the product.



After receiving his postgraduate degree, Chan found himself in between graduation and a different career. In addition to beginning a new phase in his life, he decided to pursue his lifelong passion for comics.

While a lover of humour, Chan said he is compelled to raise social consciousness through his works. "People go about their daily lives without noticing what is happening, in the political scene, in society," he said. The title of his works, "Boiling Frog", refers to a metaphorical experiment where a frog fails to notice the danger of hot water he's sitting in because the temperature is gradually being raised.

The characters, anthropomorphized frogs, are a satire for public figures and a personification of Chan himself. His recent publication is partially autobiographical, divided into four chapters chronicling the two most recent years of his life. "It's a good history book for myself to look through," he said, as he flipped to the page where two characters are at a wedding.

His target audience is the younger generation, which he wishes to attract through his use of colloquial words in the characters' dialogue. "The diction and the syntax are grounded in Hong Kong everyday language," he said. "Even the way the Chinese characters are written in these series is unique only to Hong Kong."

Due to the sensitive nature of his works, Chan uses a professional pseudonym, 'Bai Shui,' or 'White water.' The alias is a result of separating the two radicals of his Chinese name, Cun. ■

Comix Home Base presents an ongoing series of exhibitions. Easily accessible by MTR and bus, it is open 12 noon to 8pm, Tuesday - Sunday. Closed on Monday.