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In Hong Kong, Artists Open Their Studios

By *ALEX FREW MCMILLAN*

Alex Frew McMillan The artist Chow Chun Fai, at left, explaining his work at his Fo Tan studio, during last year's Fotanian Open Studios event.

Once a year, Hong Kong's largest, longest-lived artist's colony throws an open day in Fo Tan, an industrial neighborhood near suburban Sha Tin. This year marks the 10th anniversary of the event, the [Fotanian Open Studios](#), on Jan. 8, 9, 15 and 16. The Wah Luen Industrial Center (15-21 Wong Chuk Yeung Street) is the epicenter, with other studios in neighboring warehouse buildings. A map designed to guide visitors through the show is available.

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This year's event celebrates the anniversary, as well as the concept of space — appropriately enough, since artists gravitated to Fo Tan's warehouses in search of cheap rent.

Homan Ho, an artist who organizes the open day each year and runs the bookstore Ground Sixteen in Wah Luen, where he also has a studio, laments that Fo Tan is moving increasingly upmarket.

"For me it is really turning into 798," Mr. Ho said, referring to a former factory in Beijing that's now a well-known art district. "It is becoming gallery space and rich artist's space."

The Hong Kong government recently introduced a policy aimed at getting developers to redevelop old industrial space. Many of the artists fear they will be priced out of the area if they don't own their studios, which have fetched as much as 1.8 million Hong Kong dollars (about \$225,000).

Some of the artists who call Fo Tan home now frown on the open day, and prefer to keep the shutters to their work spaces — sometimes also used illegally as their homes — closed. But there will still be a record 75 studios participating this year, up from 59 in 2010.

The Fotanian show is free, with the studios open from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. Last year, some 10,000 people came to check out the artwork.

This year, the Fotanian show is running in conjunction with the Border Show, an exhibition put together by the curator Robin Peckham and his organization, the [Society for Experimental Cultural Production](#). The show explores the concept of space and

crossing borders: All the artwork is displayed in disused shipping containers, featuring pieces by artists based in Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Dongguan, Shenzhen and Beijing.

“We’re interested in this flow of the Pearl River Delta and how people and goods can flow across borders,” Mr. Peckham said. “It’s all thematically linked to the Hong Kong and Shenzhen border, exploring what it means to cross borders as a part of daily life.”

Admission to the Border Show is also free, and it runs on the weekends of Jan. 8, 15 and 22, from noon to 6 p.m. There is free transportation from the Fotanian exhibit to the Border Show, at a container storage site in Whitehead, next to the New Territories neighborhood of Ma On Shan.