



BOOKS ARE NOT PUBLISHED FOR JUST ONE COMMUNITY, BUT TO BE READ BY DIFFERENT CULTURAL COMMUNITIES. "

PUBLISHER PRESERVES LOCAL HISTORY WITH BOOKS

Publisher Mary Chan shares her vision of preserving the city's history through books.

Q: linepaper

A: Mary Chan, publisher of MCCM Creations

Q Since its establishment in 2001, MCCM Creations has been publishing books in both Chinese and English languages. Why?

A: The idea of bilingual publishing came to us after our first design book in 2003. It came very naturally, for two reasons.

Back then, there was no other Asian city as hybrid as Hong Kong. With so many inhabitants of different cultures and languages, why should we confine ourselves to publishing in a single language? With English being the common foreign language and the most accessible one for the non-Chinese residents, publishing in English was a natural option. Books are not published for just one community, but to be read by different cultural communities. Actually a few of our titles have appeared in other languages, such as French, German, Japanese, depending on the extent, theme and subject of the book

and, of course, who our readers might be. We treat each book as a different creative project. Each is unique.

Practically speaking, publishing bilingual books can be challenging – to get both languages right and design a readable layout to accommodate the two of them, as well as managing the production costs of publishing the larger books, involves extra time and effort. But, because the book genres we publish are largely visual, ranging from design, architecture, art, and picture books, the books usually have less text, and so bilingual publishing has been manageable.

Q The English books you've published are mostly about Hong Kong's art, architecture, design and visual culture. How did you evaluate readers' acceptance, especially among foreigners who may have little knowledge about Hong Kong?

A: We create our books together with our authors. We create our readership together. We make

books to inspire readers and to stimulate thought and imagination. This is the role of a book and publishing. Why should we feed the readers with things they already know or see?

They have a strong city cultural appeal, largely connected to Hong Kong. Our small collection of Hong Kong urban and city culture books has proven to have archival value over the years; they are still in fair demand. Our 'foreign' readers in general have a sense of curiosity, and are often proactive in looking for books on Hong Kong issues which they don't know about. They generally prefer books written in a leisurely or light academic manner. I guess this is a matter of learning – they seem eager to learn and discover; they seem happy with their new knowledge. And, they are eager to buy books.



Q How do you see the importance of independent book publishing in terms of preserving Hong Kong's culture and heritage?

Hong Kong is such a hybrid city, a single epic narrative doesn't do justice to the breadth and depth of its diverse cultures and heritage.

Being independent is to discover these various layers of cultures with an open mind, open heart and active listening; and to explore various creative storytelling approaches in publishing, be they words, verse, prose, fiction, hand drawings, still images, video images or animated images.

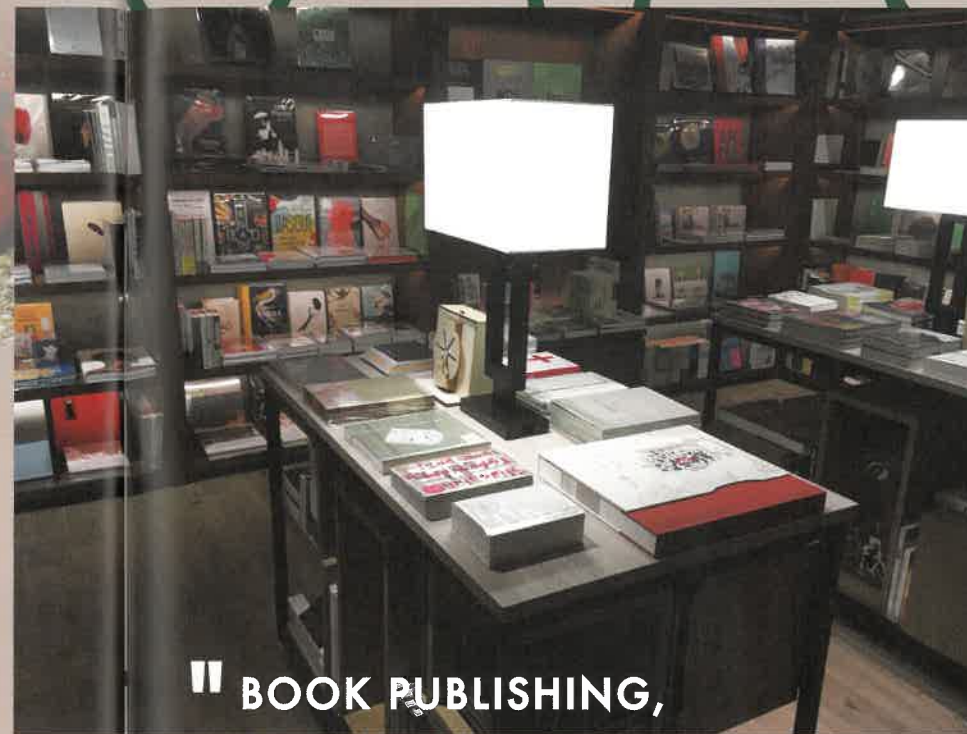
Book publishing, from day one, should be seen as a creative effort with a lasting value, not an instant attempt. Every publisher, regardless of its size, serves as an archivist of history, creating visual and written documentations of our changing cultures, cities, places, streets and people... and are depicting different aesthetics and ways of thinking. This creative and independent spirit is what constitutes a healthy book-publishing ecology.



Q Other than book publishing, MCCM Creations has engaged in bookselling and bookstore curation. The latest project is the curation of Muse Art and Books at Hotel Stage. Could you tell us about the story behind its conception, and how you harness it to promote Hong Kong to the hotel residents, and maybe tourists in general?

In Hong Kong, small presses don't have the luxury to not engage in various publishing processes, from the making of a book, to marketing, distribution and bookselling. The making of a book is always the most gratifying and creatively fulfilling process, but the story of how we stretched our resources and energy to manage the bookstore at Hong Kong Arts Centre and PMQ for six and a half years is beyond words.

Certainly, curating and running a bookstore gives us indescribable joy for three reasons: Firstly,



" BOOK PUBLISHING, FROM DAY ONE, SHOULD BE SEEN AS A CREATIVE EFFORT WITH A LASTING VALUE, NOT AN INSTANT ATTEMPT. "

Muse Art and Books at Hotel Stage (left) and MCCM Creations' pop-up store at PMQ.

every publisher or author or anyone involved in the book will want to see their published titles for sale, either at a retail outlet or online. Managing a bookstore gives books a fair chance of being displayed, seen and read by the public and readers. Secondly, bookstores should be a way of life, offering natural nourishment for readers, with good options of books which are rarely found at other bookshops in Hong Kong. Thirdly, a bookstore is where we cultivate a connection with our readers/customers – a hello, a question, an opinion, a smile, a request for a book, a purchase of a book, a book event...it is all part of the experience.

Believe it or not, how we ended up doing book curation for Muse Art and Books of Hotel Stage was entirely serendipitous. The hotel already had plans

for a bookshop space, but the space was pending for a year, waiting for the right occasion, the right people, and the right moment to kick things off. This may not be the perfect answer but it is exactly what happened.

It's always true that the location determines the profiles of visitors and outcomes in general, unless there are other cultural interventions such as exhibitions and talks. If you ask me, my ideal scenario is that every half-decent hotel should have a bookstore, not only kiosks – just like a museum or cultural centre worth its salt should have a decent bookshop. And a well-run bookstore should at the very least carry a good selection of books on local culture and heritage in an accessible choice of languages. This is how cultural dissemination should be practised.

Imagine yourself being a hotel resident or tourist: Would you visit a bookstore in the hotel you stay? ☞