



The specialist

Brighton-born, Hong Kong-based architect, designer and artist Gustav Szabo channels his creative skills into both his professional career and his life as an artist. We recently sat down with him to learn a bit more about his work, the Hong Kong street art scene and how he finds time to do it all

TEXT:
Sophie Cullen
PHOTOGRAPHY:
Courtesy of Szabotage



Szabotage

Four years ago, Gus Szabo moved to Hong Kong from London to continue his interior design role with acclaimed international design firm yoo, working alongside such visionaries as Philippe Starck, Marcel Wanders and Kelly Hoppen.

Having initially trained as an architect, he worked on various projects with the firm: "I was really lucky to work with all those people. Starck was amazing; I get goosebumps now just talking about him!" says Szabo, as we sit down to chat with him about balancing his professional career with his life as an artist.

These days, he can be found working for Steve Leung, founder of SLD and winner of *Perspective's* Pinnacle Award 2016. Szabo says that the skills that he gained from his classical training as an architect have allowed him to cross

over into a range of different fields, and he now works exclusively within the product design arm of the firm.

His diverse skill-set also crosses into the realm of art. During his 20-year stint in London, he developed his street art style in his local Shoreditch neighbourhood, working under the moniker of Szabotage, and also held a number of exhibitions in the city that were extremely well-received.

Right
Can Can Girl 1 and *I CAN*
 are both works from
 Szabotage's can project
 that was conceived as a
 response to lessening
 his impact on the
 environment through
 his work



Facing page
 Originally, Szabotage's
 iconic koi fish was
 depicted simply through
 an outline, but over
 time the artist has
 experimented with an
 array of colourways
 and formations



Since his arrival in Hong Kong, he has been inspired by the region's iconic style of urban architecture and emotive streetscapes, capturing an array of built environment scenes throughout his work. But it is perhaps his koi fish that has made its mark on the city the most. Depicting the celebrated fish jumping out of the water, a number of the works can be seen throughout the city, with a large concentration in the popular districts of Sheung Wan and Sai Ying Pun.

"The koi jumping out of the water is a jubilant symbol, and it's what I am most often recognised for. Hong Kong is very money oriented, so I think there can be a loss of focus in terms of what life's really about. People miss out on that buzz of life, as they are so busy trying to make money, and that's why I get a buzz from sharing my art here," he explains.

At the end of last year, Szabotage held an exhibition of his most recent works at Loft 22 in California Tower. Set against the backdrop of the city, guests were treated to works that included his signature bold cityscapes, pop culture figures and, of course, the koi fish.

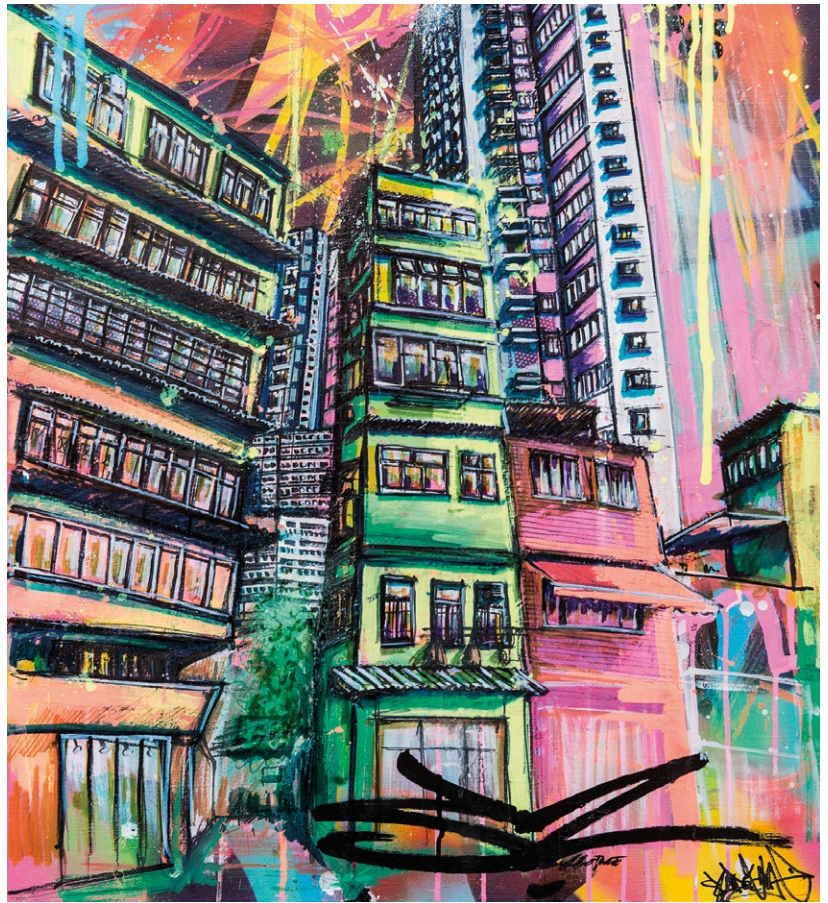
Szabotage also launched his latest series at the event, a collection of pieces executed on used, deconstructed spray-paint cans. During the conception phase of the project, the artist started to play on words with 'can' referencing can-can dancers, the Tin Man and the idea of 'I can make a difference'.

"The can stuff was very influenced by living in Clearwater Bay and seeing how much rubbish gets washed up. I now have to be a conscious street artist, and make steps – no matter how small – in the right direction."

Balancing his work-life and his life as an artist has not always been easy for Szabo. "I spent two months on my own trying to be a full-time artist, and it was like opening up a new sketch pad... There's too much to think about: 'What do I do on my first page?', 'How am I going to pay the rent?' Working as a designer is like my escapism, plus I'm surrounded by inspiring people.

"I think I've figured out how I work best. The hurdle is in understanding what you're like as a personality and running with it, and I've grasped that now... I think!" he says with a laugh.

Szabotage will hold his next solo exhibition from 29 March-13 May at: Art Supermarket, 1/F Asiatic Court, 5 Staunton Street, SoHo, Hong Kong ●



The artist says that he has long depicted buildings and urban streetscapes in a graffiti-esque way, and finds Hong Kong particularly inspiring