



Ernest Chang with some works from his "Famous By Proxy" exhibition. Picture: Jonathan Wong

ON OUR RADAR | KYLIE KNOTT

Something old, something new

It's opening night but Hong Kong artist Ernest Chang appears cucumber cool as he walks around the gallery handing out drinks, despite the fact that some of his works arrived just 24 hours before the launch.

"It was stressful," he admits, "like when a Chanel dress arrives late for an actress attending the Oscars.

"But I'm glad they are here," he says, pointing to six shiny Oscar-like statuettes that take centre stage. "They give the show a new dimension."

Chang's "Famous by Proxy" exhibition, at The Stallery, in Wan Chai, features 16 mixed-media artworks combining silk-screen prints with wood, sculpture and neon lights. Each piece is composed in the style of a Renaissance work with the figures replaced by cartoon, anime, video game or comic book characters.

"I wanted to create visual, cultural and historical hybrids," says Chang. "By superimposing images from mass culture onto classical artworks I'm introducing one group to another, appealing to two audiences.

"Some viewers will instantly recognise characters from contemporary mass culture from the United States and Japan while others will first notice scenes and images from the classics."

And the results are bold.

In one piece, titled *Sistine Madonna*, Chang adds Hello Kitty, McDull and Badtz-Maru to Raphael's *The Sistine Madonna*.

In *La Fornarina*, Chang again pays homage to the Italian Renaissance master, replacing the subject's head in *La Fornarina* with that of Arale Norimaki, the protagonist of the *Dr Slump* manga series by Akira Toriyama.

In *The Pride of Storm*, the Marvel superhero is transformed into the Roman goddess of love from

Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*, with the Hong Kong skyline in the background.

Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* also gets the Chang treatment. "The neon represents the cyberpunk nature of Hong Kong society - the head is the Pink Ranger from the Power Rangers, which I was obsessed with as a kid."

For the statue series, he turns to Michelangelo, taking the body of David and blending it with the head of Old Master Q, the 1960s character created by Hong Kong cartoonist Alfonso Wong Kar-hei.

"This is a satirical piece about class and societal and cultural differences," he says. "The body of David is a metaphor for how comics, as a form of mass 'low' art, are able to criticise and understand the ruling class, just as now in the art world, where pop art is the ruling class.

"I'm making fun of the people making fun of the people."

Purists might cringe at classical artworks sharing a room - let alone a baroque frame - with pop culture icons. But Chang's aim is to start a dialogue between ideas of high and low art; old and new; West and East; and address topics such as authenticity and identity "in an increasingly globalised world saturated with reproduction of iconic motifs".

And he is all about pushing creative boundaries.

At his previous show, last year's "Tear and Consume", Chang invited guests to interact physically and tear up his works. And they did, leaving Chang shocked - and saddened - at how "destructive and animalistic" people became.

"It took me a while to recover from that show," he says.

"Famous By Proxy", by Ernest Chang, will run at The Stallery, 82A Stone Nullah Lane, Wan Chai, until October 27.



Ernest Chang's *Sistine Madonna*.