

‘It started as an inside joke’: Hong Kong artist Mak2 on her new web series that channels Queer Eye to parody the city’s art scene

- Hong Kong’s Next Top Artist, a mockumentary based on the Queer Eye concept, will debut on February 17, as part of West Kowloon’s SerendiCity art festival
- Mak2, who is behind the series, talks about poking fun at the art world, and how work on her first big production brought her ‘a different sense of achievement’

Ashlyn Chak – Feb 7, 2023



Mak Ying Tung changed her artist name to Mak2 in 2018 on the advice of a fortune-teller, and it seems to have done wonders for her career. Since then, she’s become one of Hong Kong’s bestselling millennial artists, and is now represented by De Sarthe, one of the city’s most prominent art galleries.

Now, the visual artist is getting ready to share hot tips with aspiring entrants to the art world via her new mockumentary “Hong Kong’s Next Top Artist”. The web series launches as part of SerendiCity, an upcoming media arts festival taking place at Hong Kong’s West Kowloon Cultural District and online.

“It started as an inside joke,” she says of the series, which she co-wrote and directed. “There’s this artist whom my friends and I thought was talented and had interesting things to say; however, he hasn’t been able to make a

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name for himself in the art world, perhaps because of the way he presents himself.”

Accordingly, Mak2 and her friends devised a makeover show for artists based on the concept behind the 2000s hit reality series *Queer Eye For the Straight Guy*.



Hong Kong's Next Top Artist comprises five five-minute-long episodes released weekly that follow Mak2 as she attempts to transform an average Joe into a commercially viable art “product”.

The story begins with an amateur artist who pays Mak2 for her help and then interacts with artists, curators and other industry professionals, to learn the different aspects of artist presentation – from fashion to portfolio writing. The finale of the series sees the fictional artist host his own exhibition opening.

Featuring guest appearances from curator and researcher Anqi Li, Hong Kong painter Cheung Tsz-hin, and De Sarthe gallery founder Pascal de Sarthe, “Hong Kong’s Next Top Artist” is a lighthearted parody of the industry; the intention is for the audience to reflect upon the art world and its inner workings.

“As an artist, I’m used to doing everything alone, from conceptualisation to execution. But for this project, I got to work with a crew of a dozen people for the first time,” she says about the making of the series.

“From the script to the make-up to the camera ... There were so many things that could go wrong. It really felt like a community effort, a big collaboration.”

Despite the artist’s history of performing stand-up comedy in YouTube videos, “Hong Kong’s Next Top Artist” is her first sizeable screen production. However, that doesn’t mean Mak2 is a stranger to success. Her breakthrough came in 2019 with her “Home Sweet Home” series, for which she took inspiration from The Sims video game to create aesthetically pleasing, virtually perfect scenes.

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The series established Mak2 in the Hong Kong art scene, and works from it have sold well in recent years at art fairs in the city – including Art Basel – and beyond.

“[The “Home Sweet Home” pieces originated as] screenshotted JPEGs from The Sims. I was trying to think of a way to translate these digital landscapes into something concrete, and came up with the idea of commissioning three different painters from [Chinese online retail and services platform] Taobao to create these fragments of a perfect vision.



“The three Taobao paintings would come together to become a triptych that is fragmented, mismatched and imperfect.”

The outsourcing of the painting poses questions about authorship and authenticity. “In a way, these paintings are not truly mine.”

The artist describes the making of “Hong Kong’s Next Top Artist” as equally collaborative.

“I was so excited and pleased at the same time to see the final product when they sent it over a few days ago. To have my idea executed by a whole film crew, it’s just such a different sense of achievement.”

She adds that she has a new-found appreciation for people that work in film production. “It’s a lot harder than it sounds.”

Episodes of *Hong Kong’s Next Top Artist* will premiere at 5pm on February 17, February 21, February 24, February 28 and March 5. The series will be free to view on West Kowloon Cultural District’s YouTube channel and video archives.