



The gallery, on the opening day of the first solo exhibition of the former deputy secretary general of the Arts Development Council. Photo: Dickson Lee

# Police raid art exhibition after complaint nudes were too rude

**Vivienne Chow and Joyce Ng**

Police were early visitors to an art exhibition opening yesterday, after receiving a complaint that works by an art consultant to Louis Vuitton Asia-Pacific were obscene.

Four policemen turned up in the afternoon at Korkos Gallery on Prince's Terrace, Mid-Levels, to investigate paintings of nude females by Jonathan Thomson, who, as well as being an consultant to the French fashion house, is a curator for the brand's galleries (of which Korkos is not one) in Hong Kong and Taipei.

Thomson said that the exhibition, titled "White Girls" and featuring 67 works including 10 large oil paintings and one neon picture of nude females, was to celebrate the beauty of women and that there was nothing indecent or obscene in that.

"As an art historian, I'm actually aware that the nude is not just one subject, but the essential subject of art since [humans were painting] on the cave wall," said Thomson, who previously served as the deputy secretary general of the Arts Development Council.

"I'm surprised that people complained ... It was strange."

The police did not reveal who made the complaint.

Thomson said that every image was done in white against a white background, and the image was flat, without any shading. "They are, quite clearly, art," he said.

The police said they had referred the case to the Tela, which enforces the Control of Obscene and Indecent Articles Ordinance. A spokesman for the Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority said it would provide more information after contacting police.

Obscene Articles Tribunal adjudicator Mervyn Cheung Man-ping said it was arguable whether the case breached the ordinance.

"According to the ordinance, art productions displayed in a gallery or museum can be exempted from the law, provided that the paintings are visible only from within the premises," he said. "If the works are clearly visible to passers-by and not just an audience of art lovers, you may argue the works should not be exempted from the law."

**The nude [has been] the essential subject of art since [humans were painting] on the cave wall**

**Jonathan Thomson, whose exhibition was raided and who is an art historian**



He said that the phrase "visible only from within" in the law was clearly a safeguard to prevent people from randomly displaying things that they claimed to be art but were in fact obscene or indecent.

He said that in a case that came up

about 10 years ago, some paintings that showed human private parts and were displayed on a concourse of a commercial tower in Central were classified as Class II indecent, the middle of three categories.

James To Kun-sun, a lawmaker and solicitor familiar with the ordinance, said the legislative intent behind the clause that Cheung cited was to "make sure art works would not be displayed at an obvious location, such as the shopfront, so that children can't see them easily".

"If you have to peep into the shop, it doesn't count."

Yesterday, no art works were at the front of the gallery, though works on walls and pillars were visible to passers-by through the shop window.

"The spirit of that law was to ensure a proper display," To said. "It is too much say that it is a case of indecent articles in a gallery."

Thomson said that the police told him the tribunal would visit the gallery on Monday and make a decision. "In the meantime, the show will go on," the artist said.

The exhibition runs until June 30.