

PEOPLE

"It's a mixture of cultures ... this is really rare. Everyone, including you [and me] may feel comfortable."

Masakazu Yagyu,
Secretary-General, Hong
Kong Japanese Chamber
of Commerce

IDENTITY

"Hong Kong can be a showcase for Chinese culture."

Douglas Young,
Co-founder of G.O.D

EXPERIMENTAL TRAVEL

"The more we notice, the more we get out of life."

Tristan Gooley,
Founder of The Natural
Navigation School

ORGANISATIONS

"It's more like a revolution. We're talking about changing values."

Jeffrey Kwok,
Founder of PMM Media

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FINDING ONESELF

Hong Kong's Search for Identity



THE IRON GIANT

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ORGANISATIONS

“Everything can be used, everything can be upcycled – beautiful”

Every year, about 800,000 tonnes of metal are thrown away in Hong Kong alone. This figure represents an egregious amount of waste in a world where natural resources are running scarce.

Enter Telly Woo Sze-Wing, founder and creative director of ATB AutoArt. Desirous of salvaging scrap metal and doing social good at the same time, the effervescent designer was galvanised into action, stating: “Each auto part has its destiny and has its history, so what we tried to do is to keep a piece of history.”

Indeed, this urge to restore neglected artefacts extends to people as well. Telly hires unions of sewing ladies and ex-mechanics to create magnificent pieces of art, including lampshades made from leather seats in cars and trophies from abandoned car parts. The company also runs workshops for disadvantaged groups, as well as corporations like DBS. In the process, some of her workers discover a long-forgotten dignity deep within themselves.

At the heart of the business is the belief that everything has intrinsic worth; a refreshing philosophy in this age of planned obsolescence and instant gratification. When asked why she takes time to train older workers and at-risk youth, Telly answers that she wants to save the integrity of these groups.

“When I see their face so happy about how they can make that thing [which] can be treat[ed] like an art piece, then people love it, and I can see their smile again.”

Whilst compelling, this social mission has often made it difficult for the firm. Impatient investors have urged Telly to cut costs at the expense of her

Left

Interview with Telly Woo Sze-Wing,
Founder and Creative Director of ATB AutoArt.

upcycling ideology.

"Mainland China is cheaper and some people would think, 'Oh, no need to use the waste material! You can use the new material! No need ... Ah! People love cars, love your design, your furniture, but they don't need to buy the old one.' So that's why we are borderline. We won't do that. Each of our products, it is upcycling. No matter if it's the old one, we have our principles."

Telly sometimes sees this determination to stick to her philosophy as an Achilles' heel, calling herself a 'bad businesswoman'. She cites her own non-confrontational temperament at odds with the hostile business world, as well as the traditional connotations of aggression associated with the automobile industry.

DBS supported the social enterprise, giving the company 150,000 HKD [about 19,350 USD] and linking ATB AutoArt to other related social enterprises like Diamond Cab, with the former incorporating auto parts from Diamond Cab vehicles in its products. This has been very helpful in marketing ATB AutoArt's products, especially because advertising is a challenge that many social enterprises face.

This is a collaboration certainly befitting of ATB AutoArt - seeking out the best in everything and giving life again to the Phoenix. •

Right
Some pretty cool and very unique furniture items from ATB AutoArt

Each auto part has its destiny and has its history, so what we tried to do is to keep a piece of history.

