China Art Market Signals

Beijing and the spring season: auctions, fairs and the rules for older works

A ground-level read of Beijing's spring season and the primary-market gaps it exposes.



Exhibition hall in a former factory, 798 Art District, Beijing. Photo: Leeluv (CC BY-SA 3.0)

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AT A GLANCE

Beijing's spring, read from the ground

The second quarter is Beijing's season. Between April and June 2026, the city's two largest auction houses held their spring sales, Beijing Art Season linked an art fair with a gallery weekend, and graduation shows at the Central Academy of Fine Arts put a new cohort of artists in front of collectors. Hong Kong's spring Asian art week, meanwhile, measured how much Mainland money still crosses the border for classical material.

Classical material carried the auctions

China Guardian's spring sale made RMB 1.699 billion, up 6%, and Poly's made RMB 620 million, up 14.81%. At Christie's Hong Kong Asian art week, Mainland China was the leading region and its spending rose 173%. [S02] [S03] [S01]

Contemporary art is a small share of the auction room

Poly's contemporary art category made RMB 24.06 million, roughly 4% of its spring total. Galleries should not expect auction data to validate contemporary prices in Beijing; the primary market sets them. [S03]

The fair season is organised and municipal

Beijing Art Season ran from 21 May to 15 June and brought together more than 200 galleries and non-profit institutions across Beijing Dangdai and Gallery Weekend Beijing, with four auction houses joining the programme. [S05]

Older works need a different file

Under the revised Cultural Relics Protection Law, in force since 1 March 2025, foreign-invested relic sales and auction businesses are prohibited and relics entering temporarily must be declared and registered. [S11]

RMB 1.699bn
China Guardian spring 2026

+173%
Mainland spending, Christie's HK Asian art week

200+
Galleries and non-profits in Beijing Art Season

7,188
Registered museums in China, end 2025

Card sources: China Guardian, Christie's, Beijing Art Season and gov.cn. [S02] [S01] [S05] [S13]

How to use this issue

Pages 3 to 5 cover the spring auctions, pages 6 to 9 Beijing's fairs, districts and policy, and pages 10 and 11 the rules for older works. Pages 12 to 15 cover institutions, channels and the enquiry routine that turns interest into sales; pages 16 and 17 set out what the season shows and a checklist. Sources are on page 20.

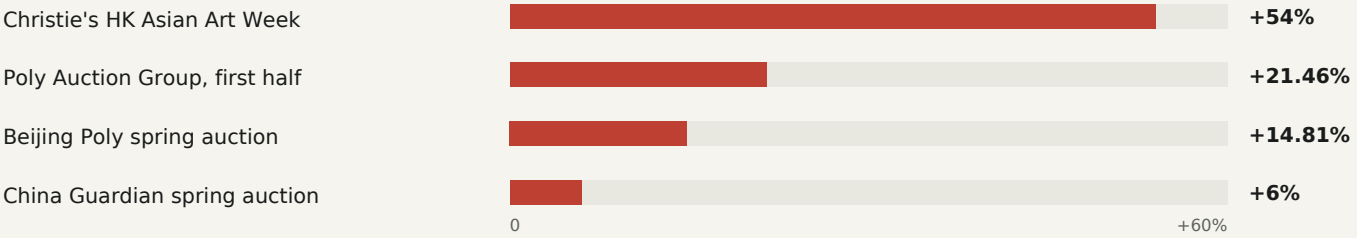
Q3 covers collector research, ordinary import costs and Hong Kong and Qianhai bonded logistics; this issue does not repeat them.

AUCTIONS / SPRING 2026

The spring auction scoreboard

Spring results arrive between late April and July. The figures below are the houses' own totals, compared with their spring 2025 sales. They measure classical painting, ceramics and jewellery far more than contemporary art.

Change against spring 2025



Sale	Total	Other reported measures
China Guardian, closed 27 May	RMB 1.699bn	81.5% sold; over 7,000 lots; 20 lots at RMB 10m or more [S02]
Beijing Poly spring	RMB 620m	8 lots at RMB 10m or more; 75 at RMB 1m or more [S03]
Christie's HK Asian Art Week, 28-30 April	HK$872.2m	Highest Asian art spring total since 2018; hammer 140% above low estimate [S01]

Two Guardian lots passed RMB 100 million: Xu Wei's Album of Studies handscroll at RMB 104.65 million and a Song calligraphy handscroll at RMB 103.5 million. Both are classical works, as was Christie's top lot, a Yuan dynasty jar at HK$174.9 million. [S02] [S01]

Jewellery is the other strong category. Poly sold a necklace of 43 jadeite beads for RMB 37.95 million, described as the highest price for comparable lots in the Mainland in nearly five years. [S03]

Totals include buyer's premium and are self-reported by each house. Poly Group's first-half figure covers all of its sales in the period, not only the Beijing spring auction.

For your gallery

- Read the scoreboard as evidence that wealthy Mainland collectors are buying again, mostly in classical categories.
- For a contemporary programme, the useful signal is participation and new buyers, not totals.

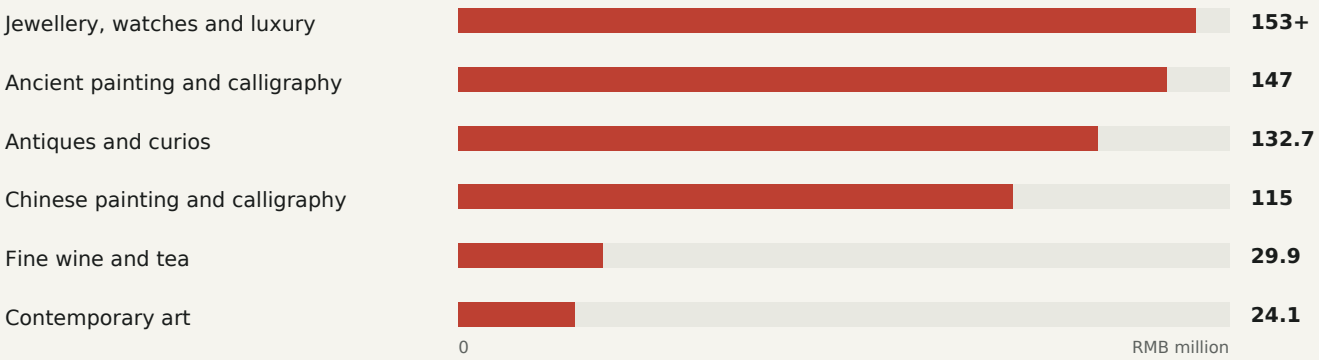
> **What not to conclude**
>
> Spring auction totals do not validate contemporary primary-market prices.

AUCTIONS / BEIJING

Inside Guardian and Poly

Poly published a category breakdown for its spring sale. It shows how narrow contemporary art's place in a Beijing auction season is, and where the depth lies. [S03]

Beijing Poly spring 2026 by category



RMB million. Categories as published by Poly; stamps, coins and letters were reported without totals. The contemporary share of about 4% is Art2asia's calculation from the published total. [S03]

Contemporary results that did appear

House	Work	Price
China Guardian	Zao Wou-Ki, 14.12.62	RMB 46m [S02]
China Guardian	Wang Xingwei, Untitled (Selling Eggs)	RMB 27.6m [S02]
Beijing Poly	Yu Youhan, top lot of the contemporary category	RMB 3.105m [S03]

Poly's ruby ring sold online for RMB 19.72 million, a record for its app, and Zhang Daqian's screen after Shen Zifan drew more than 30 rounds of bidding. Fresh-to-market consignments, some unseen for 80 years, drove the strongest competition. [S03]

For your gallery

- Mainland collectors who pay seven figures for classical works may also be visiting Beijing Dangdai. Know both sides of their collecting.

> **What not to conclude**
>
> A 4% contemporary share of one house's total does not mean there is no contemporary market. It means contemporary prices are set in the primary market, not by auction totals.

AUCTIONS / HONG KONG

Hong Kong's spring: the Mainland returns

Christie's Hong Kong Asian art week, held from 28 to 30 April, made HK$872.2 million across six live sales of Chinese paintings, ceramics and works of art. Bidders came from 23 countries across six continents. [S01]

HK$872.2m
Six live sales, 28-30 April

+54%
Change on spring 2025

+173%
Spending from Mainland China, the leading region

+33%
Increase in new buyers

Sale	Result
Ai Lian Tang Collection: 800 Years of Chinese Ceramics	HK$376.8m; 100% sold; half the lots above HK$10m
Chinese ceramics and works of art (all sales)	HK$612.6m; highest seasonal total since 2017
Classical and modern Chinese paintings	HK$259.6m; up 15%; 47% of lots above high estimate
Top lot: Yuan dynasty narrative jar	HK$174.9m; described as the most valuable object sold at auction in Asia so far in 2026
Shitou Shuwu Collection: classical furniture	HK$87.7m; hammer 153% above low estimate
Wang Yangming, Poem in Running Script	HK$63.94m; more than ten times the low estimate

Who the new buyers were

Christie's said new buyers were driven by Millennials and younger collectors. In the ceramics sales, new-buyer participation rose 11% and 40% of those new buyers were Millennials. Taiwan and Hong Kong followed Mainland China in spending. [S01]

For your gallery

- Younger Mainland buyers entering through classical ceramics are a reminder that taste is not split by age.
- Hong Kong remains the venue where Mainland collectors buy the most expensive objects; plan Hong Kong and Beijing as one season.

> **What not to conclude**
>
> A 173% rise in Mainland spending at an Asian art week of ceramics, classical paintings and works of art says nothing directly about demand for contemporary art.

FAIRS / BEIJING

Beijing Art Season 2026

Beijing Art Season is a municipal umbrella that links the city's art fair, its gallery weekend and the spring auctions. The 2026 edition ran from 21 May to 15 June. [S05]

Component	Dates (public days)	Scale reported
Beijing Dangdai Art Fair	21-24 May (23-24 May)	144 exhibitors from 49 cities in 22 countries [S06]
Gallery Weekend Beijing, 10th edition	22-31 May (26-31 May)	Main sector: 30 galleries and 10 non-profits; 15 exhibitions on the anniversary pass [S07] [S05]
Spring auctions	May-June	China Guardian, Beijing Poly, Sungari and Kaipai [S05]
Beijing 108 Hours	20-24 May	City-wide visits to the art ecosystem around the fair [S06]

Three districts, one week

Gallery Weekend Beijing centred on 798 Art District, with Caochangdi and the CBD as its other two districts. A collector can move between all three and the fair venue at the National Agricultural Exhibition Center in a single day. [S07] [S06]

Beijing Art Season lists 143 participating institutions for Beijing Dangdai; the fair's own opening release gives 144. The fair's figure is used here. [S05] [S06]

Three ways for a foreign gallery to take part

Route	What it involves
Exhibit at Beijing Dangdai	Fair application; the organiser handles the commercial exhibition approval for foreign works
Co-present with a Beijing gallery	A joint show in 798 or Caochangdi during Gallery Weekend, imported by the local partner
Visit and meet	Fair, previews and graduation shows in one trip; no works shipped

For your gallery

- Ask your Beijing partner galleries to place your artists inside the Gallery Weekend programme, not only the fair.
- Auction previews in the same weeks attract collectors who rarely visit galleries; schedule meetings around them.

> **What not to conclude**
>
> More than 200 participating institutions does not mean more than 200 institutions making sales.

FAIRS / BEIJING DANGDAI

Beijing Dangdai: how the fair is built

Beijing Dangdai's 2026 edition, themed Land Trace, filled Hall 11 of the National Agricultural Exhibition Center with nearly 20,000 square metres. It described itself as the largest art fair in Beijing this year, with nearly 1,000 artists and more than 10,000 works. [S06]

144
Exhibitors

101
Galleries in Value and Future

40
Galleries new to the fair

25
Solo presentations

Sector	What it holds
Value and Future	101 galleries, 40 of them exhibiting for the first time
Public sectors	21 artists or groups showing public works; six of them at an off-site area in China World Mall
Vitality and Collection Time	19 institutions and brands
Special Art Projects	19 exhibitors, eight of them non-profit art institutions
Curated European section	Seven exhibitors from continental Europe presenting 52 works

The fair did not publish attendance or sales totals for 2026, reporting only positive sales feedback from several exhibitors on opening day. Its next edition opens on 27 May 2027. [S06]

Before applying

- Which sector suits the programme: a gallery booth, a solo presentation or a special project?
- Who will act as importer of record, and who lodges the exhibition approval for foreign works?
- Which works can be sold in China, and which travel only for display?

For your gallery

- A first-time slot in Value and Future is realistic: 40 of 101 galleries were new in 2026.
- The curated European section suggests appetite for small, themed presentations by foreign galleries.

BEIJING / DISTRICTS

Beijing's art map, district by district

Beijing's 2023 measures for an international trading centre for cultural relics and artworks assign each district a role. The map is official policy, and it tells a gallery where each part of the trade is meant to happen. [S08]

District	Assigned role	What it means for a gallery
Dongcheng	Principal site for relic and art auctions	Home of the leading auction houses and their previews
Chaoyang	International exhibition centre; support for livestream auctions and a Type B bonded logistics centre	798, Caochangdi and the CBD gallery districts
Shunyi (Tianzhu)	Circulation cluster based on the Tianzhu Comprehensive Bonded Zone	Bonded storage, exhibition and one-stop services
Tongzhou (Songzhuang)	Original-art highland around artists' studios	Studio visits and emerging artists



Sculpture outside a gallery building, 798 Art District, Beijing. Photo: James Cullin (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Beijing's weight is considerable. The city's own Beijing Index says it holds more than half of China's relic auction firms and sales units and close to two-thirds of national auction turnover. [S09]

POLICY / BEIJING

Beijing's measures for cross-border trade

The 2023 measures were issued by five bodies, including the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Commerce, the cultural heritage bureau and Beijing Customs. Several are directly useful to a foreign gallery or consignor. [S08]

Measure	Practical effect
AEO and high-credit firms may exhibit under bond without a guarantee	Lower cost of bonded exhibitions for qualifying partners
Temporary entry and re-exit of relics handled in one application	Fewer separate filings for loans and auction consignments
Reserve price or customs-recognised price as basis for temporary import of auction lots, with a full-value pledge	Clarity on how security is calculated
Multiple extensions for relics held in a special customs area or Type B centre	Works can stay longer while sales are negotiated
Simplified review of calligraphy and seals for high-credit firms	Faster content review for ink works
Cooperation with Art Basel, Frieze, TEFAF and others encouraged	Openness to co-branded and satellite events

Tianzhu Comprehensive Bonded Zone

RMB 119.79bn
Zone imports and exports, 2025 (all goods)

+6.5%
Year-on-year change, January 2026

6th
Zone's import value rank among China's bonded zones

Culture is one of the zone's featured industries, alongside pharmaceuticals and manufacturing. Beijing Customs did not publish a separate figure for artworks. [S10]

For your gallery

- Ask Beijing partners whether they hold AEO or high-credit status: it changes the cost of bonded exhibition.

Policy measures describe intentions and pilots; availability for a specific shipment depends on the partner's status and Customs.

REGULATION / CULTURAL RELICS

Artwork or cultural relic?

The Art Business Measures, which govern gallery sales, exclude cultural relics. Relics fall under the Cultural Relics Protection Law, revised on 8 November 2024 and in force since 1 March 2025. The two regimes lead to different licences, investors and border procedures. [S12] [S11]

Article	Rule	Consequence
Art. 68	Bans trade in state-owned relics, precious relics in private collections, stolen relics and relics reported lost by other countries	Provenance checks are a legal requirement
Arts. 70-71	Separate provincial licences for relic sales units and relic auction firms; neither may do the other's business	A dealer cannot auction, an auction house cannot retail
Art. 72	Foreign-invested relic sales units and auction firms are prohibited; only licensed relic businesses may trade relics	Foreign galleries need a licensed domestic counterpart
Art. 73	Relics must be reviewed by the provincial authority before auction	Build review time into consignment
Art. 74	Sales and auction records filed within 30 days	Expect paperwork after the sale
Art. 80	Temporary entry declared to Customs and registered by a review institution; re-exit verified by the same institution	Register on entry to keep the right to leave

Unauthorised relic business can be fined two to ten times the business amount where it is RMB 30,000 or more, or RMB 50,000 to 250,000 otherwise. [S11]

Article 69 adds that relics whose export is prohibited may not be transferred, leased, mortgaged or pledged to an overseas organisation or individual, which limits what a foreign gallery can acquire in China. [S11]

The law does not give galleries a simple age test. Whether an older work is a relic is a matter for the review institution; this page is a summary, not legal advice.

PRACTICE / OLDER WORKS

Bringing an older work in and out

Galleries with secondary-market stock, estates or antiques should assume some works may be treated as cultural relics. The sequence below combines the national law with Beijing's 2023 measures. [S11] [S08]

1. **Screen the inventory**
   Flag older works, antiques and historical objects before shipping. Check provenance against Article 68's prohibited categories.

2. **Declare and register on entry**
   Declare relics to Customs and have them reviewed and registered by a cultural-relics entry and exit review institution.

3. **Choose where the work waits**
   In Beijing, relics held in a special customs area or Type B bonded centre can receive multiple extensions with national authorisation.

4. **Sell only through a licensed channel**
   A sale in the Mainland goes through a licensed relic sales unit or a licensed auction firm, which files records within 30 days.

5. **Verify on exit**
   Before re-export, the original registering institution verifies the work; an export permit is issued if it matches the record.

> **Why registration matters**
>
> Article 80 links re-export to the record made on entry. A work that entered without registration has no record to verify against when it needs to leave. [S11]

For your gallery

- Ask the shipper whether it has handled relic entry registration in Beijing before; not every art handler has.
- Keep entry registration documents with the work's file for its whole stay in China.

INSTITUTIONS

Museums, graduates and early signals

China had 7,188 registered museums at the end of 2025, which recorded 1.56 billion visits that year. Museums are not buyers in the gallery sense, but they shape which artists collectors take seriously. [S13]

The CAFA graduation season

The Central Academy of Fine Arts graduate exhibition opened on 30 April and ran to 14 May, showing more than 1,000 works by 570 master's and doctoral graduates. Two undergraduate exhibitions opened on 20 May and 8 June. [S14]

570
Master's and doctoral graduates exhibiting

1,000+
Works in the graduate exhibition

30
Graduate works collected by CAFA Art Museum

At the close of the season, CAFA Art Museum collected 30 graduate works: 14 by postgraduates and 16 by undergraduates, across Chinese painting, oil painting, printmaking, murals, calligraphy, sculpture, design, video and picture books. [S15]

Date	Graduation season milestone
30 April - 14 May	Graduate exhibition, CAFA Art Museum
20 May	First undergraduate exhibition opens
8 June	Second undergraduate exhibition opens
End of season	CAFA Art Museum announces 30 works collected

Policy encouragement for collaboration

Beijing's measures encourage state-owned museums to co-curate exhibitions with privately run organisations and support shared galleries in public spaces. [S08]

For your gallery

- Graduation shows in May and June are where Beijing galleries scout. Visiting them with a local partner shows commitment.
- An institutional exhibition in China, even a group show, helps more with collectors than an overseas press clipping.

CHANNELS / WECHAT

WeChat as the gallery's front desk

Q3 examined Xiaohongshu as a discovery channel. WeChat is where the conversation continues. Tencent reported 1,432 million combined monthly active users of Weixin and WeChat at 31 March 2026, up 2% year on year. [S16]

1,432m
Weixin and WeChat MAU, 31 March 2026

+20%+
Year-on-year growth in time spent on Video Accounts

Rapid
Year-on-year Mini Shops GMV growth, as described by Tencent

Tencent also said Mini Shops kept rapid year-on-year GMV growth and that commercial payment volume grew faster than in the previous quarter. Business Services revenue rose 20%, helped by Mini Shops. [S16]

Feature	Use for a gallery	Who runs it
Official Account	Long-form exhibition texts, artist essays, catalogue extracts	Content team, approved by the gallery
Video Accounts (Channels)	Studio and installation videos; livestreamed walkthroughs	Content team with the artist
Mini Program or Mini Shop	Viewing rooms and catalogues; transactions where licensed	Partner or local entity
WeCom	Client records and follow-up linked to collectors' WeChat	Sales staff
Groups and Moments	Previews for a defined circle of collectors	Sales staff, with care

Feature descriptions are Art2asia's summary of common gallery practice. Online sales by a foreign-invested entity may raise classification questions; take local advice before transacting through a Mini Shop.

For your gallery

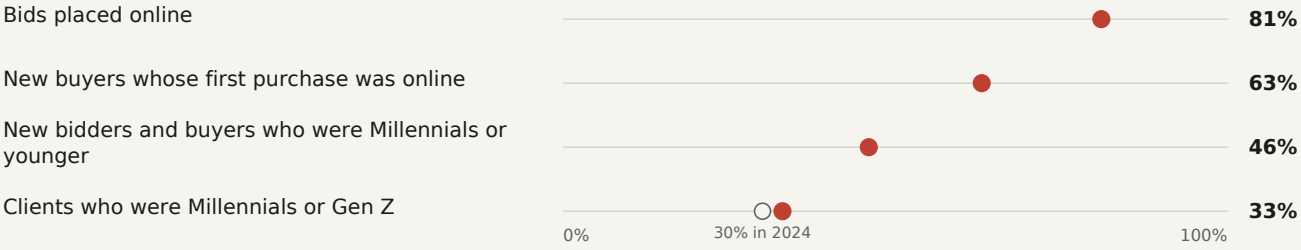
- Decide who owns the gallery's WeChat account and who may send prices before the first fair.
- Keep Official Account content in Chinese and consistent with the Xiaohongshu material.

CHANNELS / ONLINE BIDDING

Online bidding as a price signal

Online participation is now a normal part of the Chinese auction season. Poly's app recorded RMB 109 million in online sales during the spring season, with more than half of lots represented online and over 14 million page views. [S03]

What Christie's reported for 2025



The average price of those first online purchases was USD 22,700, excluding wine. That is a primary-gallery price point, and it shows the scale at which collectors are comfortable committing without seeing a work in person. [S04]

Christie's also said 2024's new buyers returned in 2025 and increased their purchase value by 54%, and 22% bought in a different category from their first purchase. [S04]

Reading online results with care

- Online totals mix jewellery, wine, stamps and art; check the category before drawing conclusions.
- A record set online, such as Poly's RMB 19.72 million ruby, can reflect one collector, not a trend. [S03]
- Livestream auctions are explicitly supported in Beijing's measures, so expect more of them. [S08]

For your gallery

- Provide condition reports, video and installation views as standard: buyers who buy online expect them.

> **What not to conclude**
>
> Christie's online figures are global, company-wide results. They show how comfortable new buyers are online, not what Chinese collectors pay for contemporary art.

PRACTICE

An enquiry routine for Chinese collectors

Most Chinese collector enquiries arrive through WeChat, often after a fair or a forwarded article. The routine below is an editorial recommendation, not a published standard. It keeps the conversation fast without losing control of prices.

Step	Within	What to send	Who
Acknowledge	Same day	Thanks, the work's image and title in Chinese; ask what interests the collector	Sales
Introduce	24 hours	Chinese artist biography, exhibition history and one essay or video	Sales / content
Qualify	48 hours	Ask about the collection, location and usual payment method	Sales
Price	On request	Price with currency, tax status and delivery terms stated	Director
Document	Before invoice	Condition report, certificate and provenance file	Registrar
Confirm	At sale	Invoice in the buyer's legal name; importer and duty payer agreed	Finance
Follow up	After delivery	Installation photos, new exhibitions, invitations	Sales

> **Price consistency**
>
> Chinese collectors compare notes. A price sent on WeChat travels; keep one price list per work and record who received it.

For your gallery

- Agree in advance which staff may discuss prices on WeChat, and in which currency.
- Prepare the Chinese biography, essay and video before the season, not after the first enquiry.
- Use WeCom or a CRM so a collector's history survives staff changes.

READING THE EVIDENCE

What the season does and does not show

A quarter of results invites over-reading. This page sets out where the evidence in this issue stops.

What this issue does not claim

- That spring auction totals validate contemporary primary-market prices. Poly's contemporary category was about 4% of its spring total. [S03]
- That fair participation equals sales. Beijing Dangdai did not publish attendance or sales totals for 2026. [S06]
- That every older work is automatically a cultural relic. The law gives no simple age test; the review institution decides. [S11]
- Which unfamiliar foreign contemporary artists Mainland collectors would buy, what a representative primary-market price distribution looks like, or how often fair conversations become completed sales for overseas galleries.

What it does show

Finding	Evidence
Classical material dominates Beijing and Hong Kong spring results	Guardian's two lots above RMB 100m and Christie's top lot were classical works [S02] [S01]
Beijing Art Season is a structured municipal platform	Fair, gallery weekend and auctions under one city programme, 21 May to 15 June [S05]
Older works follow a separate compliance path	Licensing, review, entry registration and exit verification under Arts. 68-80 [S11]
WeChat is the practical front desk	1,432 million combined monthly active users at 31 March 2026 [S16]

The largest open gaps are primary-market operating data (gallery numbers, active status, price bands and cost structures) and systematic collector interviews.

> **The editorial line**
>
> Use auction data to understand who is buying and how confidently; use fairs, institutions and enquiries to judge whether a contemporary programme is finding its audience.

PRACTICE / CHECKLIST

A checklist for the next Beijing season

The next Beijing Dangdai opens on 27 May 2027. [S06] A commercial exhibition with foreign works needs a provincial application 45 days before opening, so preparation starts well before spring. [S12]

Before the season

- Confirm which works, if any, may trigger cultural-relic review.
- Prepare Chinese artist introductions and work sheets.
- Agree internal WeChat response standards and who has authority to quote prices.
- Identify Beijing partners with AEO or high-credit status if a bonded exhibition is planned.

During the season

- Log work-specific enquiries separately from general interest.
- Attend both the fair and the auction previews, and note which collectors appear at both.
- Visit the CAFA graduation shows with a local partner.

After the season

- Review which information gaps appeared most often in enquiries.
- Decide whether the next cycle needs better dossiers, clearer terms or a different selection of works.

For your gallery

- Keep the checklist with the gallery's China file so each season starts from the last one's lessons.

METHODS

Scope and limitations

This issue focuses on the 2026 Beijing spring season: auctions, Beijing Art Season, districts, cultural-relics rules, institutions and enquiry channels. Data cut-off: results published by late July 2026; compiled in November 2026.

Content	Window used
Spring auctions	Sales held April to June 2026; results published to 23 July 2026
Fairs and Beijing Art Season	20 May to 15 June 2026
Graduation season	30 April to late June 2026
Regulation and policy	Official versions available at compilation, November 2026

Evidence used

House-reported auction totals, official fair and municipal announcements, the revised Cultural Relics Protection Law and Tencent's reported user figures.

Limitations

- Auction totals are self-reported by each house, include buyer's premium and are not audited.
- Poly's category figures come from a media report of the house's results; the contemporary share is Art2asia's calculation.
- The issue does not estimate primary-market sales or convert fair attendance into conversion rates.
- Tianzhu trade figures cover all goods, not artworks alone.
- Regulatory summaries are simplified and are not legal, tax or customs advice on any specific work.

Currency and independence

Figures are given in the currency of the source, without conversion; RMB 1 亿 equals RMB 100 million. Recommendations are Art2asia's editorial interpretation of public evidence. Art2asia has a commercial interest in gallery services.

Art2asia

For galleries building a presence in China

Art2asia provides China-market research and Chinese-language content support to international commercial galleries. The gallery retains full control of its artists, prices and sales.

Work begins with an agreed scope: the artists, the materials to be prepared, and the process for handling enquiries.

About this publication

China Art Market Signals is published quarterly. Each issue is independent and covers a different part of the market.

Issue	Focus
Q1 2026	Hong Kong as gateway; the 2025 auction year; payment, approvals and temporary entry
Q2 2026	Beijing and the spring season; bonded trade; artworks and cultural relics; WeChat
Q3 2026	Collector research behaviour; Mainland import costs; Hong Kong and bonded logistics

Request a gallery fit review

Discuss your artists, current priorities and whether a Chinese-language content programme would be useful for your gallery.

art2asia.com/start

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