Art tour heading nowhere

In this occasional column, Life!'s Biennale Beng gives his take on the exhibits that catch his eye and the gossip he hears at the art show, which runs until Nov 12.

MY FRIENDS all love the Natas Travel Fair because you can get so many good bargains there, but, sad to say, the Biennale's own travel agency isn't so hot. Worthy Tour Co (S) Pte Ltd is an artwork by Amanda Heng.

It is also, believe it or not, a real travel agency, complete with a white booth, red carpet, tables and chairs and cardboard figures of the artist-as-tour guide. It hasn't exactly been doing roaring business. It is offering a (real) nine-day tour to Hong Kong, Xiamen and Shanghai. The price of the tour and its dates have not been finalised. But Heng, a Singaporean, will be performing unspecified routines at certain stops during the tour.

Apparently, the point of her art tour is to get Chinese Singaporeans to explore the places and artefacts which may hold cultural significance for them.

I guess it's sort of like when I went on my own Young And Dangerous and A Better Tomorrow tours in Hong Kong, to pay tribute to mv screen Ah Ben~

Anyway, Heng's idea, while good, has attracted only one visitor to sign up.

And the brave soul? It turned out to be former Life! arts correspondent Tan Shizhao, who is now a graduate student at London's School of Oriental and African Studies and is currently back in town.

I called her up and asked her about it. She said: "I did so on a whim. If the dates are suitable and I have enough money, I'll go for it, lor."

I didn't tell her this, but I've found out that if no one else signs up, the tour may be scrapped.

To make sure it isn't, Heng is holding a free public forum this Saturday at the National Library, from 3 to 5pm, to discuss her ideas and drum up more interest. Panel speakers include writer Aliffian Sa'at and Heritage Society chairman Kevin Tan.

Meanwhile, the nice Biennale organisers have a badge-collecting contest where you stand to win the first prize of a plasma TV worth $5,500. Second and third prize-winners get home-entertainment systems.

What you must do is hunt for 95 badges of different designs, one for each artist or art collective in the Biennale. Three thousand of each design have been produced and are scattered around Tanglin Camp, City Hall and the Singapore Management University.

Then, go to the Biennale information counters at these three venues and get a scarf which has spots for you to pin each badge on. When you're done, take it to the Biennale information centre at SMU.

It's more difficult than it sounds, and the friends I've made at the Biennale say that, so far, no one has submitted any scarves.

Maybe Worthy Tour should start a Biennale badge-hunt day-trip instead.

HEAD TURNER: Look's like swirl's in. This art installation by artist Mark Titchner is on display at the Tate Britain in London. Titchner, who is based in London, is one of four artists shortlisted for the annual Turner Prize. The other three are Tomma Abts, Phil Collins and Rebecca Warren. The winner of the £25,000 ($57,500) prize will be announced on Dec 4.