

Now East meets West

Why there are more and more works by Asian artists at the fair, many of them on Western galleries' stands

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In the Unlimited section, Xu Zhen's *Eternity...*, 2013-14 (detail), combines the best of East and West. The sculpture is on show with Long March Space (2.1/K5)

The VIPs who came to the opening of Art Basel yesterday found more works by Asian artists than ever before—and many have been strategically placed to capture the interest of collectors. Unlike previous editions of the fair, where works by artists from the Far East were limited to those on view with the emerging Asian galleries on the fair's first floor and a few specialists on the ground floor, it now seems that nearly every gallery has an Asian work to show. This is despite the fact that there are ten fewer galleries from Asia at the fair (21 in total) compared with last year.

Many of the participating primary-market galleries, some of which now have outposts in the East, represent an increasing number of the region's artists. Even the more traditional, secondary-market Western galleries have found artists from China, South Korea, Japan and elsewhere in Asia.

One reason for the increased number of Asian works is that international boundaries are less relevant in today's expanded art world. "Collectors no longer pigeonhole artists as Chinese or Japanese, Western or not-Western; they can see stylistic relationships," says Lock Kresler of New York's Dominique Lévy (2.0/F4). Works on the gallery's stand include the Japanese artist Kazuo Shiraga's *Composition*, 1962 (around \$2.5m). Germany's Galerie Löhrl (2.0/B1) has a solo stand dedicated to an Asian artist—the sculptor Katsura Funakoshi—for the first time. At London's Marlborough Fine Art (2.0/D8), works by Anselm Kiefer and Frank Auerbach sit comfortably alongside Zeng Fanzhi's *Mask Series* (£700,000). The Chinese artist was at the fair yesterday and told us that he was thrilled to see his 1999 work again.

Theresa Liang at Long March Space (2.1/K5) has brought a solo show of works by the Beijing-based artist Liu Wei, but "you could not say that any of [the] works are strictly Chinese", she says. "You don't need to know the historical or political context of the country to appreciate the works."

Western museums, which tend to be conservative collectors, have, unusually, blazed the trail out East, showing and acquiring works by the region's lesser-known but still market-friendly artists. This has encouraged Western collectors to look beyond Ai Weiwei, Takashi Murakami and Yayoi Kusama (whose works are also at the fair). A show by the South Korean artist Lee Ufan opened this week at the Palace of Versailles, outside Paris (until 2 November), and he has works with Pace (2.0/B20) and Kamel Mennour (2.1/P9) at the fair. Pace sold a new work by the artist—*Dialogue*, 2014—for \$165,000 within the first hour of yesterday's opening.

Several Western galleries have opened outposts in Hong Kong, which is a gateway to mainland China—as has Art Basel, which launched its first edition in the city last year. London’s Simon Lee Gallery (2.1/K25), which opened in Hong Kong in 2012, represents the Japanese photographer Daido Moriyama, whose works from the 1980s (\$9,000) are juxtaposed with Larry Clark’s from the 1960s (\$35,000) at the fair. New York’s Lehmann Maupin (2.1/J9), another Hong Kong adventurer, sold Liu Wei’s *Untitled*, 2014, for \$150,000.

Galleries are also using Asian art as a calling card to attract the interest of the region’s all-important new collectors. Asian collectors were busy at last month’s auctions in New York, showing a growing taste for high-end Western contemporary and Modern art. On the ground floor at Art Basel, several galleries have placed Asian works outside their stands to entice people in, and have also given the pieces lower-than-average prices. Su-Mei Tse’s photograph *...et à l’horizon, il y avait l’orage*, 2014 (€1,800, edition of five) hangs outside Galerie Tschudi (2.0/C2). She has “the only Chinese name in our gallery, so Chinese and other Asian collectors are a bit more attentive”, says the gallery’s director Elsbeth Bisig, quickly adding that “most people discover her through her work”. At Marian Goodman Gallery (2.0/B17), the Chinese artist Yang Fudong’s *New Woman I*, 2013 (€25,000), hangs outside the stand.

The fair’s organisers are working hard to attract more Asian buyers, particularly those who have built or planned private museums. One, Qiao Zhibing, a Shanghai-based nightclub owner, visited yesterday. “There are many Chinese collectors here this year,” he said, adding that “Art Basel is my favourite”, although he also visited Art Basel in Hong Kong last month. The fair launched a Global Patrons Council this week, partly to promote the fair internationally. Its 70 private collectors include Wang Wei, the co-founder of China’s Long Museum, David Tang and Uli Sigg.

“Asian collectors are really interested in buying contemporary art right now, from everywhere,” says Shi Yong of China and Singapore’s ShanghArt (2.1/K15), before joking that “there are too many Chinese buyers at the fair this year”.