

ArtsHub

Art Fair gives space to the anti-market

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The Artissima contemporary art fair is set apart by its orientation around appreciating the art.



Friends , Lovers and Financiers (2014) by Tobias Kaspar, from Per4m [Image: atpdiary.com/ \(http://atpdiary.com/\)](http://atpdiary.com/)

Performance art cannot be sold so traditionally doesn't interest art fairs. But Artissima last week welcomed the art market's performing antagonists.

The Artissima contemporary art fair is without a doubt the most important art event in Italy and among the most significant in Europe. For last week's 21st exhibition, exhibitors came from Shanghai to Rio de Janeiro, from Cape Town to Helsinki- to transform Turin into a truly international art hub for the week long show.

What sets Artissima apart from other contemporary art fairs in Italy and Europe, is the fact that it is not just about buying and investing, it is oriented around appreciating the art.

That has particularly rung true during the last installment when the Fair took the radical step of introducing a section for performance art.

'Over time people are getting more curious about the features of the artworks,' explained gallerist Joseph Tang. 'Whereas for other art fairs it would be more about selling, here it's about the curiosity, about the depth of knowing something.' He believes Artissima's new director, Sarah Cosulich Canarutto, has given a stronger structure to the event: 'She is really trying to make the fair compelling. All the new initiatives have been enthusiastically received.'

The exhibition SHIT AND DIE and the performance space Per4m were among the initiatives that made up the six major sections of the fair. Other sections included the Main Section for international galleries; New Entries, devoted to young galleries; Back to the Future, dedicated to solo exhibitions by artists active in the 60's and 80's, and selected by museums directors; Art Editions, with artists' books and prints; and Present Future, solo shows featuring emerging artists.

Xiaoyu Weng, one of the curators for Present Future, has found Artissima to be a very experimental art fair, featuring risk-taking galleries: 'It's not all about sales. You don't see a lot of objects. It's more project based, all the works are really talking to each other.'

Per4m has been one of the more significant innovations seen at Artissima this year. The concept of giving room to performance art - the anti-market art form par excellence - in a commercial venue is quite unusual. 'Here the performance is not simply a collateral event, as it happens elsewhere' Sarah Cosulich explains. 'It has the same weight of all the other sections of the fairs. Most importantly, it has a commercial value, with material produced during the performance being sold. In Turin we are innovators, we like to try out new things and Artissima is famous for experimenting. So why don't we give a commercial chance to performance art?'

Per4m featured 16 performance pieces presented in different locations inside the fair's pavilion. Many of these pieces sought for an interaction with the audience, others were itinerant renditions. Within the latter category were 'Allure' by Leah Capaldi, and 'AMEN - Il boschetto dei giovani artisti' by Marcello Maloberti, who orchestrated a parade through the stands. Shaun Gladwell closed the performance program with his piece titled 'Reversed Readymade'. In this much-awaited performance, champion BMX freestyler Matti Hemmings rode a replica of Marcel Duchamp's Bicycle Wheel, stopping every so often to take selfies. In line with the commercial intents of Per4m, 'Reversed Readymade' also produced sellable objects. These included videos, photographs, sketches and obviously the Duchamp's Bicycle Wheel replica.

The 2014 edition of Artissima was also fortunate on the sales side. 'This year there was real interest. Collectors bought works for our mutual satisfaction' gallerist Enrico Astuni remarks. Having been the only Italian gallery participating in the event since its inception, Galleria Astuni has witnessed a lot of changes. 'Back in the day Guttuso was the best seller. But aside from market trends, the biggest innovations have been in the fair structure. Since Bellini's artistic direction the changes have been amazing. Then Sarah Cosulich Canarutto really improved the fair and gave an international touch to it. She accepted the challenges of the economic crisis and pushed Artissima to the next level.' In Astuni's opinion, if it wasn't for Italian bureaucracy and heavy taxation, Artissima would easily gain the same recognition as the Frieze art fair.

Artissima is a definite must for established galleries. What lures younger galleries in, though, is the access to a different kind of collectorship, one you wouldn't find at Art Miami. This year saw the Athr Gallery from Jeddah's third participation in Artissima. They are finding it increasingly profitable and dynamic: 'Aside for the high-quality work you can find in the gallery books, we have particularly appreciated Cattelan's show SHIT AND DIE.'

SHIT AND DIE is part of One Torino, the exhibition traditionally associated with Artissima and connected to the city of Turin. This year it was organized by retired artist Maurizio Cattelan together with Myriam Ben Salah and Marta Papini. The setting is the evocative and historical Palazzo Cavour, home to Count Cavour, one of the founders of Italy. Deemed by many as a typical Cattelan-style provocation, SHIT AND DIE is actually much more than that. It is a profound and enchanting meditation on many aspects at the core of human existence. It pushes people to reflect on a variety of issues, including art's fetishism, sexuality and subconscious. The exhibition features important names in international contemporary art, from Tracey Emin to Pascale Marthine Tayou, and will run until January 11, 2015. With its hugely public success, this exhibition has certainly managed to capture the cultural – and not only commercial – vocation of the Artissima Contemporary Art Fair.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Naima Morelli is an arts writer and curator who specialized in Italian contemporary art and art from the Asia-Pacific area.