

Why Having Less International Galleries at Art Stage Singapore 2017 was Actually a Good Thing | COBO Social

cobosocial.com Updated Jan 23rd, 2017

Why Having Less International Galleries at Art Stage Singapore 2017 was Actually a Good Thing

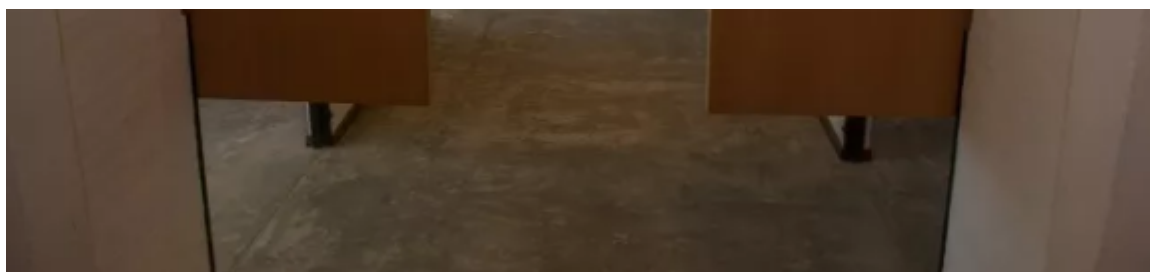


Henri Depardieu Gallery, Paris



Zemack Contemporary Art from Tel Aviv





Piero Atchugarry Gallery



Eduardo Secci Gallery, Florence



Françoise Livinec. Photo: David Raynal, Swing Féminin





Henri Depardieu Gallery, Paris

23

Jan

[Naima Morelli](#)

[23](#)

43298

1376

Naima Morelli is an art writer and curator with a focus on contemporary art from the Asia Pacific region. She has written for ArtsHub, Art Monthly Australia...

[View Profile](#)



Art Stage Singapore 2017 saw the participation of international non-Asian galleries decreasing compared to last year. This was due mainly to shifting in the Asian fairs ecosystem. The result was a distinctively Southeast Asian art fair.

TEXT: Naima Morelli

IMAGES: Namia Morelli & Art Stage Singapore

Art Fairs are funny creatures. They all look pretty much the same when you are skimming through the art at the booths, saying hi to the person you met three months earlier at that other fair in Paris. Or was it Manila?

This is what fairs are made of: an international art community, a handful of big-name artists, a few collateral exhibitions – because of course the boundaries between art fair and exhibition are getting more and more blurred nowadays – and talks. Talks to understand why we are even taking the trouble to organize our lives around those seemingly identical events. But hey! That's capitalism, baby. And there's nothing you can do about it.



Zemack Contemporary Art from Tel Aviv

Then, one Singaporean day in January, something unexpected happened. You were just resigned to leave the persistent heat – signalling you were not in London but in the tropics. Walking into the air conditioning you would feel like entering that metaphysical, suspended ‘art world’ where people don’t sweat, where walls are always white.

Making your way through the corridors of Art Stage 2017, you slowly started noticing that, unlike the previous editions of the fair, the overwhelming majority of the 130 galleries from the 27 countries was coming from Asia and Southeast Asia. Few non-Asian galleries were in sight. At first you are a bit uncomfortable. What happened to those gallerists who were cheerfully greeting you at their stands with those exotic European accents? Was it perhaps something about the quality of Art Stage which left them disappointed?

It turns out that this was not the case for the majority of those who decided to not come back this year. In the fragile and hectic art ecosystem every small change matters. The main reasons for many galleries not to participate were actually tied to a few crucial factors. One was the dates. This year Art Stage shifted to the beginning of the year (12-15 January from the previous 21-24 January), leaving little room for galleries – and also collectors – to organize. This was the case for Uruguayan gallery Piero Atchugarry, which participated to Art Stage both in 2015 and 2016. The previous two editions didn’t leave him disappointed. Mr. Atchugarry found the fair international, meeting collectors not just from Asia, but also from the Americas. “Art Stage 2015 was my first experience with a major fair and the first time in Singapore. That time I presented only one artist.” Art Stage 2016 gave him the chance to strengthen his network in Asia. “For the second edition I brought in more artists, but I found out most of the attention was limited to just for some of them. Some galleries complained, but at the end of the day for me personally it still was a good fair.”



Piero Atchugarry Gallery

The main reason Piero Atchugarry didn’t participate this year was that they moved the dates early on. “Ten days make a huge difference. In Uruguay right now is the best season of the year with a lot of art activities going on. Last year it was already quite challenging to leave in advance, but this year I really couldn’t lose ten more days. It became impossible.” There have also been collateral factors that discouraged Atchugarry’s participation, which were shared also by a few others American and European galleries: “The proximity of Art Basel Hong Kong in March was also something that I found affected last year’s Art Stage. Collectors think that if there is a major fair like Art Basel Hong Kong just around the corner, I might as well just wait a couple of months.”

The second edition of the competitor fair Singapore Contemporary, happening a week after Art Stage also worried some non-Asian galleries. Although Singapore Contemporary had a different target and price range for the works, it still presented itself as an alternative. Paired with the opening of the Jakarta branch of Art Stage, foreign galleries started wondering if the regional market was big enough. In that regard, what emerged was a cautious attitude of international galleries towards the local art market. The facts that the Asian art

world is extremely dynamic and art fairs an expensive business, many galleries preferred a more conservative approach with their investments. Conversely, Asian galleries – with more insights into the local market and less costs to bear – didn't hold themselves back.

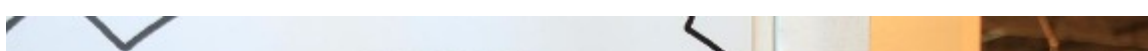
Some Australian galleries, which are relatively closer to Asia, felt more adventurous. “For us it is an opportunity to gauge the Singaporean art market and connect with collectors from the region at large, especially from Malaysia and Indonesia. People also come over here from Australia,” says Mike Mitchell, director of Brisbane gallery Mitchell Fine Art. “This is our second year at Art Stage and we have witnessed a growing interest.”



Eduardo Secci Gallery, Florence

Not all the international galleries present at Art Stage were so positive. “As a multiethnic society and a financial center, Singapore seemed to me a good place to be. The quality of the fair isn't bad either, but definitely needs improvements,” says Eduardo Secci from Eduardo Secci Gallery. “This is my first time to join an Asian art fair and the response from the public wasn't as positive as I expected.” To him, it all boiled down to taste. He felt Asian collectors are looking for very different types of work from Western collectors. Such a perception had held him back from joining Asian art fairs in the past, and his participation at Art Stage 2017 confirmed his intuitions. “I think that Asians look for works which ‘interact’ more with the spectator on a visual level,” observes Secci “Generally speaking, I see Asian collectors being more anchored to an old-fashioned kind of painting which tends to be more decorative. The ‘museal’ or photographic works which are best-sellers in the US, here are not really sought after.”

Participating at Art Stage for the 5th time, Tel Aviv gallery Zemack was able to understand and leverage the Asian collector's taste, and was very positive about the fair: “We are really enjoying being here, and we want to continue participating in the future. I find that Art Stage is a really interesting melting pot of cultures, artists, collectors and people in general.”





Françoise Livinec. Photo: David Raynal, Swing Féminin

A few of the absent galleries also reported having a good experience in the past editions of Art Stage. The reason they didn't show up was more of as a rejection of the draining fair system altogether. An example is the experience of the Parisian Françoise Livinec Gallery. They were there for Art Stage Singapore 2016 and eager to observe the state of the art market in Asia and in the region. That proved an interesting ground for the gallery which works with a lot of Asian artists from China, Korea and Japan. "It was really stimulating, meeting a lot of young galleries, collectors and visitors," says galleriest Françoise Livinec. "I also discovered new emerging artists."

The main reason for the gallery not to participate in 2017 were not linked with Art Stage organisation per se, but rather to the decision to focus on the activities in France. Going against the grain of galleries tending to abandon their physical location to devote themselves to art fairs, Françoise Livinec Gallery decided to triplicate their locations. "This takes a lot of time and requires attention and structural reorganization of the gallery." Françoise Livinec sympathizes with the idea of an Asian art fair being more about locality: "The ideal Asian art fair should present both emerging and established galleries and artists from the region where the event takes place. I think that a fair is a snapshot on the national, regional or international art market at a certain moment in time."



Henri Depardieu Gallery, Paris

This year Art Stage has aligned itself with what other players in the Southeast Asian art scene are trying to do outside the market, in the institutional and independent art scene; making it less about quantity keeping the good quality and, above all, making it about the locality. Even if this was not a deliberate decision from Art Stage, it ended up working well in fighting the "McDonald's effect" of globalized art fairs.

The enhancement of locality – or rather 'glocality' dare we say – is particularly

important at a time when art fairs are expected not only to sell work to the privileged few, but also be inclusive opportunities to create community and to educate. And perhaps this time, heading to the next art event, you would exactly remember at which art fair in the world you last met that friend curator of yours. It was in Singapore.

Naima Morelli is an arts writer and curator with a focus on contemporary art from the Asia Pacific region. She has written for ArtsHub, Art Monthly Australia, Art to Part of Culture and Escape Magazine, among others, and she is the author of “Arte Contemporanea in Indonesia, un’introduzione” a book focused on the development of contemporary art in Indonesia. As a curator, her practice revolves around creating meaningful connections between Asia, Europe and Australia.

[#Art Stage Singapore#Eduardo Secci Gallery#Françoise Livinec Gallery#Naima Morelli#Piero Atchugarry#Singapore Contemporary](#)

Leave a Comment

You must be [logged in](#) to post a comment.

Evernote makes it easy to remember things big and small from your everyday life using your computer, tablet, phone and the web.