

The Art Market

High mood but slower sales at Art Basel Hong Kong

Brazilian galleries join forces; Idris Elba rallies support for African art; landmark Yves Klein show hits New York



Udomsak Krisanamis's mini-golf game installation at Art Basel Hong Kong

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Exhibitors at Art Basel Hong Kong were enthusiastic at this year's VIP opening as the event returned to a full-scale, post-pandemic 242 galleries. The sheer size of the fair, set across two floors in the vast Convention and Exhibition Centre, invites maximum-impact, eye-catching art — this year even including a game of mini-golf by Thai artist Udomsak Krisanamis (Roh Projects).

“We had high expectations and brought works at high price points — and so far, so good,” said Elaine Kwok, managing partner at Hauser & Wirth, on the March 26 opening day. Her gallery's sales included a two-metre-high 1986 painting by Willem de Kooning for \$9mn, while Victoria Miro gallery reported sales of three works by Yayoi Kusama, including an immersive “Infinity Mirror Room”, for a combined \$11mn.

Hong Kong-based collector Edmond Chin, creative director at jeweller Boghossian, witnessed “lots of Mandarin spoken, almost as much as Cantonese” — a sign that visitors from mainland China had defied the country's economic gloom to visit the fair. But on the whole, he added: “There were fewer big-ticket, auctionable works.”



Yayoi Kusama's immersive mirror work 'Where the Lights in My Heart Go' (2016) © Yayoi Kusama | Ota Fine Arts; Victoria Miro

The pace of sales was indeed relatively slow. “Some clients are a bit hesitant and cautious about what they are spending,” said Huang Yaji, founder of fair first-timer Each Modern from Taipei. She described the fair overall as still “an amazing platform” with “great collectors and curators” and made some early sales of work by the avant-garde Chinese artist Chen Ting-Shih (up to \$150,000).

Emi Eu, executive director of STPI, said she had sold “a bit of everything” from her mixed booth (\$2,000-\$150,000 range). “There has been a [market] recalibration but there are a lot of new faces here, especially from the younger generation, and the vibe is great,” she said.

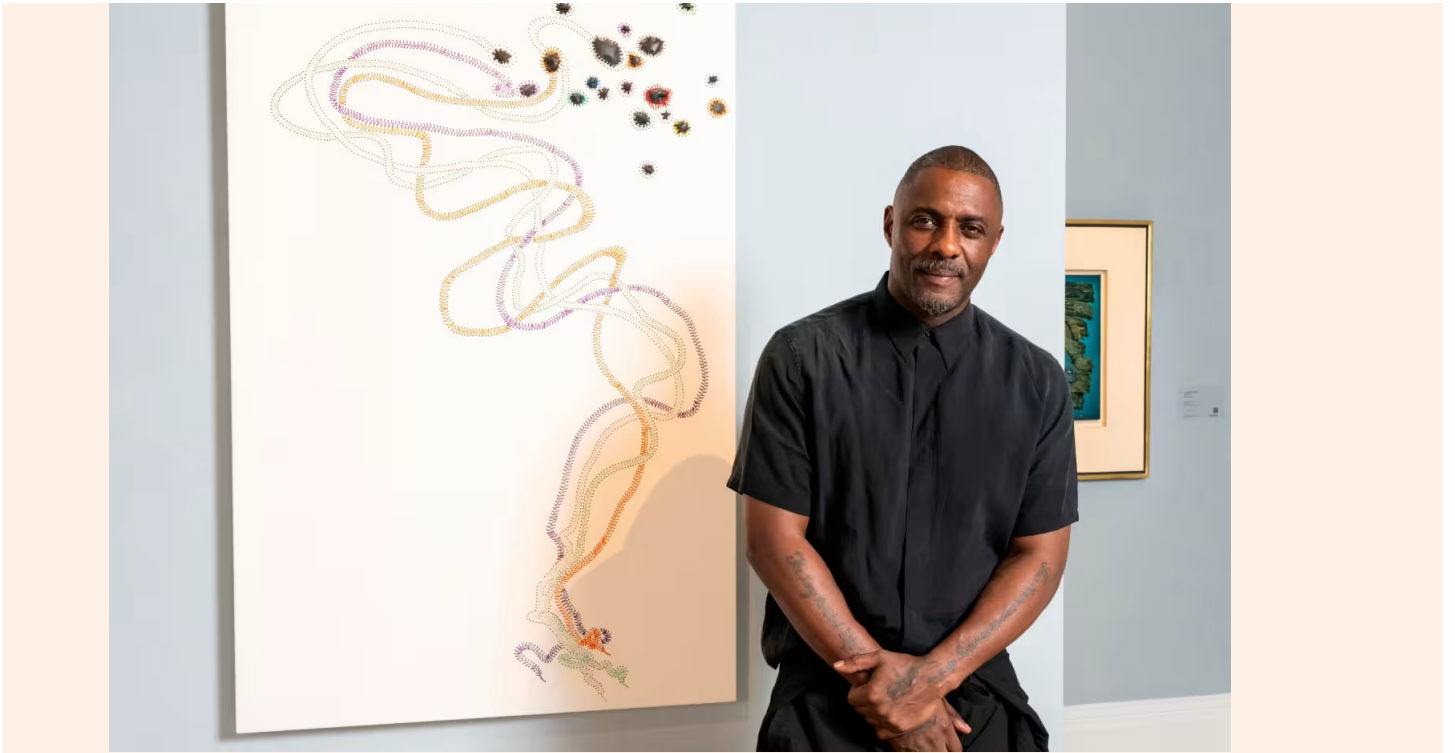


Brazilian gallerists Maria Montero, Yuri Oliveira and Jaqueline Martins © Francio de Holanda

Two prominent galleries in Brazil — Jaqueline Martins and Maria Montero’s Sé Galeria — have merged to become Martins&Montero and will open in a new space in São Paulo’s leafy Jardim Europa neighbourhood on April 2. They will keep Martins’ existing space in Brussels, opening as Martins&Montero on April 13 and run by partner Yuri Oliveira.

The founders acknowledge the difficult market environment but, as Montero says, “This is not a financially motivated decision, it is about being able to be more ambitious together.” Martins, who organises Condo in São Paulo, where galleries offer spaces to international peers, says it was “very simple” to team up.

Both galleries lean towards the cutting edge, in contemporary and historic art, with Jaqueline Martins the more internationally visible. Their first show in both locations will be of the Brazilian artist Jota Mombaça (mixed media, €7,000-€40,000). This comes just ahead of Mombaça’s inclusion in the main exhibition at next month’s Venice Biennale, organised by Brazilian curator Adriano Pedrosa, in which two of the merged gallery’s other artists also feature.



Idris Elba: African art is 'in no way a fad' © Haydon Perrior

Idris Elba got behind the growing African art scene the evening before Sotheby's dedicated auction on March 21. Speaking on a panel, the British actor told the audience that the continent's louder voice on the international stage is "in no way a fad" but that for growth to continue, "Africans need to own the narrative . . . It needs reframing." There is, Elba said, "a stigma [in Africa] that the creative industries are not serious".

His passion was not enough to pep up a disappointing sale, which came in below its £1.6mn-£2.4mn estimate with a total £1mn (£1.3mn with fees). Nearly a third of the 98 works offered went unsold, including by Amoako Boafo, Aboudia and emerging name Alexis Preller. "We were maybe too ambitious with some of our estimates but are overall really pleased," says Hannah O'Leary, Sotheby's head of Modern and contemporary African art. "This is still a relatively emerging market that we are building."



Irma Stern's 'Still Life with Watermelon and Dahlias' (1937)

The bulk of works were at auction for the first time and, she notes, the sale made six artist records, with bidding from 28 countries including Cameroon and Angola. Other 20th-century artists — notably Ben Enwonwu and Irma Stern — fared well and, increasingly, Africa's artists are offered in the more general sales. "We are bringing them in line with their mainstream peers," O'Leary says.

Visitors will be invited to touch — but not see — a nude model inside a box, part of a landmark exhibition of body-based work by Yves Klein, which opens at Lévy Gorvy Dayan (LGD) in New York on April 11. "Sculpture Tactile" was conceived by Klein around 1957, incorporating two holes fitted with sleeves, but was not staged in his lifetime.

Klein (1928-62) ventured into performance in 1958 when he used a model covered in paint to leave her imprint on his canvas, leading to the *Anthropométries* series. These form the bulk of the LGD exhibition of about 30 works, which also includes some of his burnt *Peintures de feu* from the same period (1960-62). Among the paintings will be Klein's "Anthropométrie sans titre (ANT 101)" (1960), a four-metre-high image of arching figures that has not been shown in the US since the 1960s, the gallery says.



Yves Klein's 'Untitled Anthropometry' (1960)

On show too will be a recreation of Klein's "Pigment pur bleu" (conceived 1957), a floor installation of grains of International Klein Blue, a colour trademarked by the artist, while LGD will stage Klein's "Monotone-Silence Symphony" (c1947-49) — a single note held for 20 minutes followed by 20 minutes of silence, so something of an endurance test — in St James' Church on May 1.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime show for me," says gallery co-owner Dominique Lévy. *Yves Klein and the Tangible World* is organised in collaboration with the artist's foundation and runs until May 25 with most works coming from private collections. A handful will be for sale, Lévy says, for seven-figure sums.

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