

## MARKET

Art Basel in Hong Kong Kicks Off With Optimism  
and Style

Ann Binlot, Tuesday, March 22, 2016



Kyungah Ham, *Chandeliers for Five Cities* (2016).  
Image: artnet News

Art Basel in Hong Kong got off to a good start Tuesday despite the showers that plagued the city. The fair's fourth edition saw 239 galleries from 35 countries fill two levels of the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre. More than 60,000 visitors are expected to attend Asia's premiere art fair through March 26.

Although China's economic downturn caused speculation over the fair's performance, Art Basel in Hong Kong director Adeline Ooi assured the press that this wouldn't reflect in sales at the fair, adding, "Asia isn't just China."

Art Basel in Hong Kong is "the greatest show that Asia has ever seen in an art fair context," Art Basel director Marc Spiegler told artnet News. These were big words for the continent's largest art fair, but the strength of the works on display validated Spiegler's grand statement.

The 2016 Encounters offerings boasted some of Art Basel in Hong Kong's strongest works. Curator Alexie Glass-Kantor selected just 16 artists, who included [Iza Genzken](#) and [Lawrence Weiner](#), to create original commissions for the fair. Each piece told an interesting story, from [Kyungah Ham](#)'s chandelier embroidery paintings manufactured by North Korean textile workers to Tintin Wulia's installation of cardboard and drawings that reference the cardboard recycling network created by Filipino migrant workers in Hong Kong's Central district.

"I hope that Encounters this year reflects the kind of texture of connectivity, of collaboration, of generosity of spirit," said Glass-Kantor at the press conference.



Night Gallery at Art Basel in Hong Kong.  
Photo: Courtesy of Ann Binlot.

Night Gallery had a vast offering of beautiful figurative paintings by Mira Dancy in the Discoveries sector, and after a sold-out booth with the artist at Frieze London, her booth at this fair is expected to have similar results.



Constantin Brâncuși, *Le Coq* (1924/2013).  
Photo: Courtesy of Ann Binlot.

On the sales floor, Paul Kasmin offered Constantin Brâncuși's *Le Coq*, a 2013 edition of a 1924 bronze, for \$6 million, while Van de Weghe was selling Pablo Picasso's *Buste au Chapeau* (1971) for \$13.5 million. A region-appropriate \$1.2 million set of 10 Andy Warhol screen prints on paper of Mao Tse-tung piqued a lot of interest at Marlborough's booth, where a gallery rep was confident that it would sell by Saturday. Galerie Perrotin showed a 2016 Takashi Murakami work covered in skulls at \$1.2 million. Galleria Continua displayed an impressive 250,000 Euro work composed of countless black marbles within a circle by Lebanese artist Mona Hatoum.



Zao Wou-Ki (1963).  
Image: Courtesy of De Sarthe Gallery

De Sarthe Gallery had made two sales in the first few hours of the fair: a 1963 red painting by Zao Wou-Ki and another red work by Ma Sibó, *A Day Within a Day* (2016). The booth was filled with red works. "The Chinese audience likes red," said the gallery's executive director Laure Raibaut. "It has a lot of positive meaning in their culture." While Raibaut would not say how much the specific works sold for, she said works in their booth ranged from "a few thousand to the tens of millions." Bernard Jacobson gallery also brought several red works, including a large 1987 canvas by Robert Motherwell, though gallery director Robert Delaney said the prevalence of the color in the booth was unintentional.

At White Cube, there were discussions for a £675,000 (\$959,000) Damien Hirst spot painting, while a hand-painted Hirst *Spectrum* depicting the hues of the popular Spectrum oil paints, priced at £360,000 (\$511,600), was still available.



Leonardo DiCaprio.  
Image: artnet News

Less than an hour into the private preview, a crowd filled the aisle between Galerie Perrotin and [Sprüth Magers](#) thanks to an A-list celebrity sighting. Just three weeks after his Oscar win, Leonardo DiCaprio, who was accompanied by an entourage that included Wendi Deng, was caught eyeing a \$400,000 [George Condo](#) painting over at Sprüth Magers. "We have a few people lined up," a gallery representative later told artnet News, assuring us that it would be sold by the end of the fair.

**[Related: Take a Look Inside Leonardo DiCaprio's Growing Art Collection](#)**



Fernando Botero, *At the Park* (2006).  
Image: Courtesy Galerie Gmurzynska

[Galerie Gmurzynska](#)'s booth was divided mostly between the works of Colombian artist [Fernando Botero](#) and Cuban artist [Wifredo Lam](#), both of whom are "interesting for the Asian region," according to gallery director Mathias Rastorfer. Botero has been strongly collected in Indonesia, Malaysia, China and in 2015 had an exhibition at the National Museum of China in Beijing. The Botero painting, *At the Park*, sold for \$1.3 million within the first hour to an Asian collector new to the gallery, while two bronzes by the artist, from 2006 and 2011, had sold by the end of the first day for \$400,000 apiece. Also in the booth were a series of watercolors that were playful interpretations of the Kama Sutra, or what the artist calls "Botero Sutra."

"People are cautious, and people are thinking," Rastorfer said with respect to the economy and its effect on buying behavior at the fair, "but I bought only things that are art historically and market-wise very sound. So there's nothing hyper-speculative. And I think that's much-appreciated in this environment."



Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg, *A Thief Caught in the Act (Blue with Orange Legs)* (2015), installation view at Art Basel in Hong Kong.  
Image: artnet News

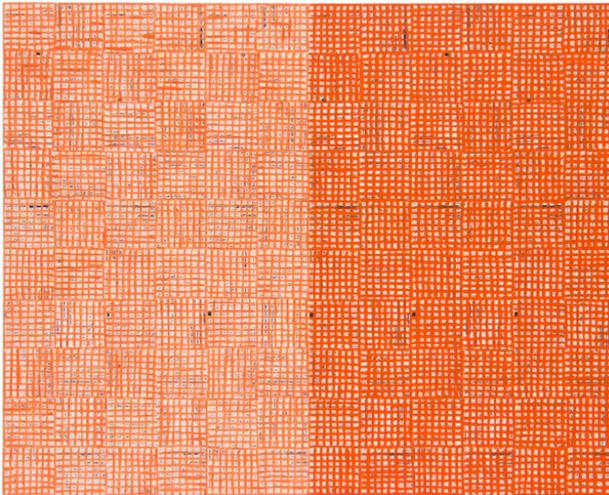
At [Lisson gallery](#), a 2015 work by Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg, *A Thief Caught in the Act (Blue with Orange Legs)*, a colorful sculpture of three birds surrounded by what appear to be pharmaceutical pills, whose oddness is accentuated by a light that turns on and off, sold for €60,000 (\$67,600) to a private collector in Scandinavia.

Spiegler noted "the rapid and really strong evolution of Asian galleries," over the fair's four years of existence. One of the most impressive pieces by an Asian artist was a 1988 work by Nam June Paik composed of 20 Quasar television monitors at [Hakgojae Gallery](#).

Sales were brisk at the Asian galleries. Tokyo- and Singapore-based [OTA Fine Arts](#) had a [Yayoi Kusama](#) spotted pumpkin triptych on reserve for just over \$1 million. Meanwhile, at ShugoArts, a painting by emerging Japanese artist Masaya Chiba sold for \$40,000 and a life-sized wood sculpture of a magnolia by Yohishiro Suda went for \$27,000. Hong Kong-based Galerie du Monde had a \$39,000 Stella Zhang installation of black fabric and acrylic sculptures based on the female form on reserve.

Kukje and Tina Kim galleries jointly presented an impressive installation of the work of Kyungah Ham, *Chandeliers for Five Cities* (2016), (pictured at top) in the Encounters section. For this series of works, the South Korean artist had sent large-scale canvases to be embroidered in North Korea, a process that takes at least one year to complete. "Sometimes," said the gallerist about the works, which were valued at over \$1 million, "they never make it back. So these are like survivors." According to the gallerist, several institutions, one a Hong Kong-based museum and another in the US, had expressed interest in acquiring the work.

A Kim Kardashian photograph by Juergen Teller at Contemporary Fine Arts got some SnapChat traction as one visitor imitated her crouched position on all fours for the camera. At press time, the £40,000 (\$56,800) work had not yet sold, but a €42,000 (\$47,000) piece by Gert and Uwe Tobias had.



McArthur Binion, *dna: white painting: test for seasons: XV* (2016).  
Photo: Courtesy of Ann Binlot.

Chicago's Kavi Gupta reported that a McArthur Binion grid painting was sold for \$38,000.



Rudolf Stingel, *Untitled* (2010).  
Image: Courtesy of Dominique Levy

Dominique Levy reported a sale of an untitled work by Rudolf Stingel, which was asking \$1.9 million. The gallery also sold a work by Park Seo Bo for \$250,000 and noted that there was strong interest in the work of Lee Ufan, Chung Sang-Hwa and Pierre Soulages.

With strong interest in so many pieces only five hours into the VIP private view, Wednesday's vernissage is sure to garner increasing sales results for the fair, which will wrap up March 26.

*Additional reporting by Rozalia Jovanovic.*

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