

Istanbul's contemporary art fair went ahead



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Despite the worrying political and economic context in Turkey and the cancellation of two Istanbul art fairs already this year, the Contemporary Istanbul (CI) art fair took place (3 – 6 November). And despite a reduced number of exhibitors (thirty less than last year), the 11th edition of Contemporary Istanbul demonstrated a pretty good resilience.

The fair's exhibition space is colossal: almost 14,000 m² divided between central the Lütfi Kırdar ICEC Rumeli and Istanbul's Congress Center and it hosted some 1,500 works by 520 artists represented by 70 galleries. Last year was the 10th anniversary of the fair and was particularly dense. Indeed, the 2015 edition attracted a record number of visitors: 84,000 (even more than the Paris FIAC), proving that the CI fair has successfully established itself in the global art fair circuit. However, this year, around twenty fairs have been cancelled around the world...

Contemporary Istanbul's primary vocation is to support Turkish Contemporary art, established or emerging. That's why this year's show devoted a large section to Turkish collectors, via an exhibition entitled *Collectors' Choice* organised by **Marc-Olivier Wahler**, curator and art critic, who was commissioned to select 120 works from 60 Turkish art collections. While Turkish art was naturally the dominant force at the fair with 57% of the exhibitors based in Istanbul, the fair's international dimension is still very important. This year – like last year – twenty different countries were represented at the show.

London's Marlborough and Steve Lazaride galleries and Paris's Galerie Lelong made the trip to Istanbul providing three particularly strong stands at the fair. The **Marlborough's** enormous space was never empty, enticing visitors with a masterful sprawling piece in white ceramic by Ahmet GÜNESTEKIN (1966). This 49 year-old Turkish artist was discovered at Contemporary Istanbul in 2010 at the **Baraz** gallery stand and earned rapid international visibility thereafter. Well known by his compatriots, Ahmet Gunestekin made his auction debut in Istanbul about ten years ago and his prices are currently ranging from \$15,000 to 40,000 for a large oil painting. In 2010, one of his works sold for more than \$120,000 at a sale organised by Beyaz Pazarlama at Istanbul's Sofa Hotel. However, since a failed sale at Bonhams in London in 2011, Gunestekin's works have not been offered for sale outside Turkey. Meanwhile, his work has been shown in Venice, New York, Monaco, Barcelona and Amsterdam... So, with a growing CV of international exhibitions, his next appearance in a non-Turkish auction room is bound to elicit a better response.

Next to the Marlborough's stand, **Steve Lazarides** opted for a distinctly anti-White Cube display: an open space with red paint dripping down black walls. This "shock" presentation looked as though it was designed to boost visitors' adrenaline-response. In the middle of the floor, there was a hyper-realistic sculpture by Mark JENKINS (1970) and the walls had paintings by ZEVS (1977) (also exhibited at the Château de Vincennes in *Noir Eclair* until 29 January 2017). Among other works, there was a wide photographic fresco by **JR**. At the **Galerie Lelong** (based in Paris and New York) we found a careful selection of masterpieces, including iPad generated works by David HOCKNEY (1937) and a remarkable drawing by Barthélémy TOGUO (1967) who was nominated last month for the Marcel Duchamp prize at the Paris FIAC.

Several major Turkish galleries also played the international card including Istanbul's **Artist Gallery** which presented a sculpture by **Tony Cragg**, a tattooed pig-skin by Wim DELVOYE (1965) and a wide composition by GILBERT & GEORGE. In contrast, the young German gallery owners of **BerlinArtProjects** – well connected to the ultra-contemporary Turkish art scene – preferred a minimalist stand showing four paintings and one video by **Bugra Erol**, a promising new thirty year-old with little exposure outside Istanbul apart from the BAP's Berlin gallery.

Alongside the commercial galleries, Contemporary Istanbul also focused on nine institutions, all Turkish, save one: the **Basu Foundation for the Arts**, which came from Kolkata (India) to select a young Turkish artist for a residency in India. On the Basu Foundation's stand, we found three former Kolkata residency artists (who include JR (1983) and **Prune Nourry**): the Turkish photographer Yusuf SEVINCLI (1980) (represented by Galerie Les Filles du Calvaire in France and Elipsis Gallery in Istanbul), the Spanish photographer Miguel Angel GARCIA (represented by the Laurence Miller Gallery in New York and shown at Paris Photo from 10 to 13 November 2016) and the French artist Thomas HENRIOT (1980) (represented by Galerie Céline Moine in France) whose work was shown in London last September (Start, Saatchi Gallery) and in Paris in October (YIA Art fair). The next artist selected by the Foundation Basu is Ardan OZMENOGLU (1979): an opportunity to build new links between the two creative poles that India and Turkey both represent today.

The current climate of political instability, tension and violence coupled with a fall in the value of the Turkish lira against the dollar, obviously had an impact on the fair: a sculpture by the artist Turk Ali ELMACI (1976) was removed from its stand on 3 November under pressure from the conservative nationalist group Erbakan Vakfi which considers the work to be offensive. A few hours later, following the arrest of several opposition members, access to social networks – Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube – was blocked throughout the country... Nevertheless, the CI generated sales at a fair where exhibitors expressed solidarity simply by responding to Güreli Ali's (the fair's director) invitation to be present.