

Asia Now Fair Director Alexandra Fain On Bringing Asian Contemporary Art To Europe

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Contributor ⓘ

I write about luxury, art and culture.

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As [Asia Now](#) closed its doors this past weekend in Paris, I sit down with its cofounder Alexandra Fain to discuss the rapid expansion of the first Asian contemporary art fair in Europe, whose eighth edition took place at the [Monnaie de Paris](#) (Paris Mint) for the very first time. Among the 78 exhibitors showcasing 250 artists from 26 countries were Yeo Workshop, Yavuz, Jeanne Bucher Jaeger, De Sarthe, Frank Elbaz, Lee-Bauwens, Galerie LJ, Michael Janssen and Louis & Sack, as well as blue-chip galleries Almine Rech, Nathalie Obadia and Perrotin, which exhibited simultaneously at Paris+ by Art Basel.



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Alvin Ong, *Uncut*, 2022, oil on canvas, 260 x 200...
PHOTO COURTESY OF YAVUZ GALLERY

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What has been the premise of Asia Now since you launched it in 2015? What are some of the stereotypes around Asian contemporary art that you have helped to dispel?

The original idea of Asia Now was to introduce great emerging, rising stars or even established artists in a more global conversation, still off the radar for a large majority of European collectors, and have them be part of an even more global conversation in Paris, where the art world gathers the third week of October every year. This has been part of our mission since the beginning. The guarantee of discovering a large part of the world through guest curators' eyes, to make our collectors, visitors and art lovers travel through performances, screening programs and conversation platforms, as well as a thorough off-site program at Musée National des Arts

Asiatiques Guimet, is what truly makes Asia Now a destination fair. We provide a platform for better visibility and understanding, being part of an inclusive community and make the world even larger. We contribute to facilitating a new dialog that can better represent the diversity of Asia by

showing artists from the region and the diaspora. I guess that what we fight against more than anything else is exoticism in art. We are looking for artists who have a point of view and bring something to the conversation. The fair asserts itself a little more each year as a project art fair.



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How is Asia Now an art fair that speaks of the pressing issues facing the world?

For the second year of partnership with Thanks for Nothing, our programming highlighted the socially committed Asian art scene. The speakers raised awareness among the general public about themes and current events that affect our societies in order to give the keys to new forms of commitment. Aimed at deepening the understanding of cultures of different regions of Asia, they questioned the historical and geographical approaches, putting forward the curatorial practices and social commitment of actors of the art world. Asia Now, a fair focused on raising awareness about commitment and ecology, takes part in the upheavals of the world. The years 2020 and 2021, by setting us up in a concept of lasting crisis, have invited us to raise awareness. Thanks to the artists, curators, collectors, institutions and galleries who contributed to its eighth edition, Asia Now continues to adopt a de-centered look at the world, to observe it through other prisms.

Asia Now is also a fair that spots and highlights new talent...

Since its inception, Asia Now has unveiled a number of visual artists who have since entered the international scene and have even represented their countries at biennials, including that of Venice, such as Shilpa Gupta (Asia Now 2020) and Nabuqi (Asia Now 2017), who were in the exhibition “May You Live in Interesting Times” in 2019. Jitish Kallat was presented in the Indian Pavilion and He Xiangyu (Asia Now 2019, 2020) in the Chinese Pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2019. Remen Chopra W. Van Der Vaart (Asia Now 2020) featured in the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015 and Thu-Van Tran (Asia Now 2021) in the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017. The fair continues year after year its work of discovering emerging artists through the choices of foreign galleries little known in France, while welcoming more and more

already renowned artists represented by international galleries, including major French galleries. Established artists from the Asian scene are also present in institutions, museums and major exhibitions, reassuring buyers and

major exhibitions, reassuring buyers and collectors, alongside a more confidential or unknown scene in Europe that can be discovered at Asia Now.



Mak2 (Mak Ying Tung), Home Sweet Home, Fashionably [+]

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PHOTO COURTESY OF DE SARTHE GALLERY

Why did you decide to move location to the Monnaie de Paris on the Left Bank after many years on Avenue Hoche?

Since its kick-off exhibition during the 56th Venice Biennale, then its first edition at Espace Pierre Cardin, then Avenue Hoche, Asia Now has continued to evolve organically. This evolution has always been a response to the expectations of the galleries and in the progressive affirmation of its DNA as an “edited” fair, a platform including a

cultural program supplementing and enriching the artistic relationship offered through the galleries' projects. The years of crisis that we are going through on a global scale have also had the effect of inviting everyone, individuals and groups, to become aware of and reflect on a desirable future and ways of being together. Art is one of the main issues in this dynamic of reinvention that Asia Now affirms, thus joining a general move and major trend that makes Paris a world capital for art today. The arrival of Paris+ by Art Basel of course reinforces this underlying trend for years now. The Monnaie de Paris offers a very productive dialog between contemporary creation and an exceptional heritage setting, in the historic heart of Paris, on the banks of the Seine opposite the Pinault Collection and the Louvre. The distribution of the Monnaie site between its noble rooms and its outdoor courtyards allows the welcoming of galleries in spaces of exceptional quality, the development of a real route for collectors to meet creation from Asia. The punctuation of this journey through the different routes makes it possible to cultivate what's specific to Asia Now: its warm and friendly character combined with the requirement to discover works at the forefront of world creation.

PHOTO COURTESY OF YEO WORKSHOP

Why did you focus on ceramics for this eighth edition?

The many ceramic works, in the booths of the galleries and throughout the space, introduced the idea of alloying the elements of fire, earth and water, in resonance with the striking of the metal specific to the activity of the site currency. This highlight around ceramics thus introduced the consideration of manual practices, the reappropriation of know-how from a European point of view or their expression on the same level as other practices, in an absence of hierarchy.

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Sangwoo Kim, 2022, ceramic, 80x 70 x 80 cm PHOTO COURTESY OF LOUIS & SACK

Tell me about your “L’Asie Maintenant” off-site programming at Musée Guimet.

The “L’Asie Maintenant” program in partnership with Musée Guimet places emphasis for the first time on the photographic medium in a museum space where the presentation of objects usually takes precedence. In the immediate environment of Mr. Guimet’s historical library, the work of Anne de Henning, a war reporter who notably covered the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971 and 1972, is presented, supported by the Samdani Foundation. Her photographs are honored on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of its independence. The photographs of Ram Rahman, with the support of The Guild, come to translate the reciprocal influences between India and Europe in architectural modernity, that of Le Corbusier in particular. Echoing them, the photographs of Ram Rahman underline the remarkable architecture of Musée Guimet. Its grand staircase, whose landings are comparable to promenades of ocean liners, was designed by Henri Gaudin as a real architectural gesture

revealing modernity. Wifredo Lam's exhibition at Musée Guimet, curated by Nicolas Trembley, who was also our guest curator for the "Mingei Asia Now" exhibition at Asia Now this year, responds to a double revelation. On one hand, that of the little-known practice of ceramics by Lam, recognized for his pictorial works. His ceramics made in Albissola in Italy are presented in the windows of Musée Guimet in dialog with Chinese Qing ceramics because Lam, who bridges Europe and Cuba, has Chinese ancestry through his father from Canton.

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