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Milan finds its footing in the contemporary art world

Things are changing in Milan. Slowly, but surely. Whilst there is still some work to be done, the city can now finally call itself a leading hub for contemporary art.

The inauguration of HangarBicocca came first in 2012, followed by the huge space acquired by the Prada Foundation in 2015 – where the following year, a space was dedicated to contemporary photography. The strength of Miart Fair, whose 2017 edition is being held from March 31 to April 2, along with last year's opening of the FM Center for Contemporary Art have all contributed to Milan's new status as a leading player on the contemporary art scene.

"Over the last two years, the contemporary Milanese art scene has really evolved," says curator of the Lombardy city FM Center, Marco Scotini. "The international audience and collectors that Miart and Milan Art Week attract are proof of this. There are also a number of galleries who plan to settle in Milan, coming from Berlin and other capitals, whilst many artistic publications also made this year's trip. These are signs that do not deceive"

However, as Marco Scotini points out, the museums opening over recent years have been private institutions, "nothing moves on the public side," he says. "There certainly should be a new scene of collectors in Italy, whose level of research is equivalent - if not superior — to that of international collectors," he says. However, there isn't. "The level of knowledge currently exhibited by Italian collectors cannot compare to that of the international clients Italian institutions have become accustomed to. This is the reason why such a close relationship between FM Center for Contemporary Art and international collectors has developed."

Elsewhere at Miart (a private event, of course), things are evolving under the artistic direction of Alessandro Rabottini. "Miart is now one of the most important fairs in Europe," says Charlotte Trivini of Pact Gallery. The gallery won the award for best booth in the fair's 'Emerging' section, for which participation fees are affordable at less than €5,000, with the fair also housing gallery owners at a hotel for the duration.

The Slovenian gallerist based in Berlin Gregor Podnar first participated in MiArt in 2003, "it is now a different scene altogether with international collectors," he says. It seems that whilst Berlin enjoys an artistic effervescence, there are few collectors. "Italy is our strongest market in Europe with very open and knowledgeable collectors."

For Trivini, this changing landscape of collectors is also apparent, "we have not noticed a strong interest on the part of the younger generation for contemporary art," she says, "but rather experienced or enlightened amateur collectors in their forties. Though some are relatively new collectors, they approach contemporary art with enthusiasm and humility."

The latest edition sees the fair take an innovative step, opening a new invitation-only section: "Generations". The idea is to highlight artists of different generations, selected by renowned curators Nicola Lees (Senior Curator of the Public Program at the Serpentine Gallery and Curator of the Frieze Projects in London) and Douglas Fogle (former curator at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and former Vice Director of the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles) whom Miart have previously associated with.

The fair has also seen a number of new leading galleries join this year, including Marianne Boesky (New York), Gladstone (New York-Brussels), Alison Jacques (London), Antoine Levi (Paris-Brussels), Jocelyn Wolff (Paris), Zeno X (Antwerp).

Foundations have been laid, but effort is still required

Despite these advances, with the legacy of Boetti – from the radical 70s art movement "Arte Povera" – still prevalent in the region, you get a sense that emerging artists are not the primary concern of local dealers. Complex heritage laws concerning the export of works over 50 years old also contributed to the stagnation of Italy's presence on the international scene and as a consequence emerging artists suffered.

"It is an old problem from which Italy has not yet escaped, and I don't think it's because of a lack of support," says Scotini "When an international curator is invited for a studio visit with an emerging artist in Italy, he usually answers that he has no time — and I think I would say the same thing." Clearly there is still work to be done!

The Italian artistic vision remains isolated and regional. "I tried to respond to this by creating the NABA Academy and an MA in Visual Arts and Curatorial Studies. But of course, it will take years," explains Scotini.



Scotini blames cultural policy for the country's complicated relationship to its artists and its market "I think Italy needs a cultural reform," he says. "With ministry born in 1974, in a country where the word "culture" encompasses such a wide variety of practices and places, it is a bit bizarre. You just need to look at the pavilion at the Venice Biennale, it is discouraging."

However, despite what might seem a gloomy outlook Sottini is keen to offset his criticism by highlighting a number of Italian artists on the international scene including Monica Bonvicini, Lara Favaretto, Massimo Bartolini and Luca Vitone, as well as emerging talents that include Adelita Husni-Bey, Céline Condorelli, Danilo Correale, and Rossella Biscotti.

