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New Date, Director and Galleries Reinvigorate Contemporary Istanbul in Art Fair's 12th Year

written by **Jennifer Hattam**



Istanbul — Glossy, hyper-real street scenes, phantasmagorical portraits, neon-infused installations and large-scale metal sculptures were among the big, bold works featured at the 12th Contemporary Istanbul as the art fair sought to return with a splash after a difficult year for Turkey in 2016.

New Contemporary Istanbul director Kamiar Maleki, a well-known London-based collector, brought fresh energy to the fair, according to Leila Heller, president of the New York- and Dubai-based Leila Heller Gallery.

“Participating in Contemporary Istanbul this year was a sure bet for us because of Kamiar,” Heller said. “He has a big following and a great eye and we knew he would bring in a high-quality group of collectors and galleries.”

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.



Organisers sought to focus on quality over quantity this year, with 73 galleries presenting some 1,500 artworks at the fair, which was held 14-17 September. The fair was moved up from its typical November timeframe to coincide for the first time with the Istanbul Biennial, now in its 15th edition, as well as dozens of museum and gallery openings around the city. This “week full of art” concept generated enough positive energy that Contemporary Istanbul will continue to be organised in the second week of September in the years ahead, Chairman Ali Güreli announced at the preview of the fair.

“We’ve gotten a good vibe from having the fair run along with the biennial this year,” said Müge Çubukçu, head of sales at Galerist, one of Istanbul’s leading contemporary art galleries. “There’s been more of an international crowd and more international coverage than in previous years, and people are very engaged with the works on display.” The gallery’s ceramic works by Elif Uras, a Turkish artist who combines traditional İznik ceramic decorative techniques with imagery that comments on women’s lives and changing gender roles, “really connected with people,” Çubukçu said.



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Another young gallery participating in Contemporary Istanbul for the first time, Berlin-based Bernheimer Contemporary, also brought a solo show to the fair. Artist Daniele Sigalot’s playful, cheeky spray-painted-aluminium sculptures — including towers of crumpled papers representing “A good idea on top of 27 bad ones,” and an oversized post-it note “A good idea on top of 27 bad ones,” and an oversized post-it note puncturing art-world pretensions — made the gallery’s stand “the most Instagrammed stand” at the fair, boasted owner Isabel Bernheimer.

The fifth-generation gallerist said she also appreciated how the Istanbul fair helped bring together the European and Middle Eastern art worlds. “In Berlin, we wouldn’t have these connections with buyers from Dubai and Kuwait,” Bernheimer said. “We’ve made good contacts and sales that wouldn’t have happened if we hadn’t been at this fair.”

by Jennifer Hattam

Jennifer Hattam is an Istanbul-based journalist whose writing on arts and culture, environmental and social issues, food and travel has been published by CityLab, Culinary Backstreets, Discover, Disegno, Lonely Planet, Sierra, the Thomson Reuters Foundation and various other outlets. She can be found on Twitter as @TheTurkishLife.