BUILDING BRIDGES
Art Stage posits that art can’t be defined by price alone

AS CONTEMPORARY ART fairs mushroom around the world, it may be hard sometimes to differentiate between them. In Asia, Art Basel Hong Kong has now firmly established itself as a gathering of the giants of the international art world. The more modest Art Stage Singapore, now in its fourth year, with more than a hundred galleries participating, has developed a unique identity by anchoring itself firmly on Asian ground.

“A lot of art fairs offer a very general presentation, with no reference to the market of the location where they are held. They largely present Western art and Western galleries. Art Stage, on the other hand, has always had a strong Southeast Asian focus. But it has never fallen into the category of being a regional fair because it upholds international standards of presentation, and deftly mixes Western and Asian galleries of importance,” says Sundaram Tagore of Sundaram Tagore Gallery, which has participated in the fair since its inception.

The founder-director of Art Stage Singapore, Lorenzo Rudolf, says this year’s edition offers collectors “a step in a totally new direction” by presenting curated regional platforms to help inform them about the range of art in the region.

“Asia is still very, very segmented; each art scene is mainly national. In other words, we have to build really strong bridges between these art scenes, bring them together, and liaise with them,” he says.

Rudolf also acknowledges a widening gap between the commercial and academic art worlds today. “Years ago, academics, museums, critics were making the artists. But the art world has now turned on its head; today it’s the market. But more and more people are realizing ‘Asia is still very, very segmented. We have to bring these art scenes together.’

we need to bring back the two together. You can’t only define art with prices, sizes, and brands. Art is culture and needs content and context. That’s why we are working with leading Asian curators with our new platforms. We are bringing commerce and academics together, even if ultimately everything is commercial and for sale.”

There will be eight platforms — India, China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and Australia — each offering a mix of established and emerging artists.

“We wanted platforms that would be a first introduction to a specific art scene. We didn’t want to go in a cutting-edge direction. But in the future, we want to play with the format. I could imagine choosing very young curators, or foreign curators showing their own vision of another art scene,” says Rudolf.

— SONIA KOLESNIKOV-JESSOP

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