

Several firsts for Art Stage Jakarta

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By Cheah Ui-Hoon

Singapore and Malaysia galleries are gearing up to take part in the city's second edition this weekend.

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GALLERIES in Singapore and other countries in the region, such as Malaysia, are finding a foothold in the Indonesian contemporary art market, thanks to Art Stage Jakarta which is making its sophomore outing this weekend.

It's all about learning more about the tastes and sensibilities of Indonesian collectors, say regional gallerists who are new to the country. Gajah Gallery, which is taking up the biggest exhibitor space at the fair this year, sees a huge potential in the market.

"Jakarta is always challenging because of the infrastructure, but the collectors are a different breed. They're stronger and bigger (than others in the region) but there still needs to be a better pool of quality galleries in the country," says director Jasdeep Sandhu.

Art fairs such as Art Stage boost confidence of collectors, and this is something that he had envisioned five years ago. Having moved into the Indonesian market earlier than other Singapore galleries, Gajah Gallery started the Yogya Art Lab in 2013 to develop production standards in Indonesia. The gallery got a nod that it's going in the right direction when Damien Hirst's Newport Street Gallery acquired an Ashley Bickerton work that was fabricated in Yogya.

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Market voices on:

But South-east Asia is still in infancy where collectors and artists are concerned, in coming together as a group, he feels. Gajah Gallery will be presenting works by Suzann Victor, Ng Joon Kiat, Jason Lim, and Kumari Nahappan for this outing.

For Malaysian gallerist Richard Koh, it's important to develop a local market before one thinks of a regional one. For him, the fair is really about getting a better sense of the local Indonesian market and developing his contacts there.

"With the exception of Singapore which is more international, all regional fairs are really about the local markets," he notes. "Otherwise it's like building a house with no foundation."

Because it's a local market, it takes time for the locals to get comfortable with you, he believes. Richard Koh Fine Art will be presenting a solo exhibition by Yusra Martunus, entitled "Self-rule". The decision to carry an Indonesian artist is so that it will help "ease the dialogue" and have the public and collectors get familiar with the gallery.

While the gallery sold well last year, it did so to a foreign buyer. "While I'm not complaining, I'd also rather sell to Indonesian buyers," he says, adding that his list of Indonesian collectors is still rather short.

Art Porters Gallery's Guillaume Levy-Lambert sees Art Stage Jakarta as playing the role of matchmaker, bringing the diverse and distinct individual South-east Asian art scenes together to create a stronger single South-east Asian art market.

Last year, Mr Levy-Lambert's question was whether collectors would buy Indonesian art from a Singapore-based gallery run by a Frenchman. "And the answer is yes. I think collectors were happy to support Indonesian artists, they appreciate our art curation and can also connect with our selection," he notes.

The gallery continues to represent Naufal Abshar and Wayan Novi this year but will be adding works by Erianto and Agung Santosa - all whose poetically humorous works will be "accessibly priced". The only foreign artist it is carrying is French artist Artheline, for his sculptures.

Also attending the fair again, Kuala Lumpur-based Wei-Ling Gallery decided to focus on three artists who are producing abstract works.

"The artists are all a decade apart, so they do give a representation of Malaysian art. The show is tighter and more curated," she says. The artists are Fauzan Omar (born 1951), Juhari Said (1961) and Hamidi Hadi (1971). On the whole, the Indonesians are warm and welcoming, and open to learning about Malaysian art, she finds.

The fair, as Art Stage Jakarta's second edition, will see 60 galleries compared to 50 last year. Twenty-four of them are Indonesian. As it did in its first edition, the fair will feature a collector's show section. It will also be organising Art Stage Jakarta Week, a first-of-its-kind art event gathering various art activities together to position and promote Jakarta as an internationally competitive art capital.

The fair will host a special interactive art project by up-and-coming Indonesian collective Double Deer, made up of Indonesian artists and musicians who work at the intersection of art, music and science. In Off the Wall - Europe Meets Asean, urban artists from the two parts of the world will present street art.

The fair has also established an inaugural Indonesian Award initiated by top collector Alex Tedja - to recognise the best of the best across the entire art industry of Indonesia.

Art Stage made its foray into the bustling metropolis of 10 million people last year after six years in Singapore, where it had established itself as South-east Asia's biggest commercial art attraction, attracting about 40,000 local and international visitors. According to Art Stage, the number of active collectors in Indonesia is estimated to be around 4,000 to 5,000 - which makes it one of the biggest markets in South-east Asia.

Art Stage Jakarta fair will be held from Aug 11 to 13 at Sheraton Grand Jakarta Gandaria City Hotel, Jl. Sultan Iskandar Muda, Kebayoran, Jakarta, ID-JK 12240, Indonesia.

For more information, visit www.artstage.com

