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Art Fairs

Art Fairs May Be Getting Blander, But Mexico City's Zona Maco and Material Offer a Model for Regional Events to Thrive

Latin America's leading art fair is still going strong, although it needs to keep innovating and evolving.



As Latin America's leading art fair, Zona Maco, welcomed invited collectors on Wednesday there were two very different things on international gallerists' minds. Would Mexican collectors be in a buying mood one year into the socialist presidency of Andres Manuel Lopez-Obrador, better known as AMLO? And looking further afield, would Art Basel in Hong Kong be postponed amid fears of the fast-spreading coronavirus?

Within hours of the fair's opening in Mexico City on February 5, the answer to the first seemed a definite 'yes,' with early sales made by Lisson Gallery, Sean Kelly, Pace, and Kurimanzutto, among others. (As for ABHK, a lack of updates from Basel meant gallerists' shipments for its Asia edition remained on hold, with the rumor mill running full-speed. Twenty-four hours later the news arrived that [the fair was indeed cancelled.](#))

At Lisson's booth, the London and New York gallery's executive director Alex Logsdail stood beside a new sculpture by the Mexican artist Pedro Reyes; the piece had been snapped up by a Mexican

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collector who acquired it for his foundation. Logsdail described Zona Maco as being a regional fair, but “in a good way.” He’s been showing there for the past decade—building relationships with collectors from Mexico, as well as with regular attendees who fly in from across South America as well as Texas, California, and New York. Logsdail said there are a handful of collectors willing to spend millions of dollars on a must-have work, but for many, budgets max out around the \$250,000 to \$300,000 mark. Reyes’s volcanic stone column, *Siete Piedras* (2000), went for \$160,000, arguably a bargain for such an impressive piece.

Another Zona Maco veteran, Sean Kelly, said the fair is important on the global map partly because of Mexico City’s well-established artistic culture, which is as lively as ever. He also praised the sophistication of the city’s collectors, who match nicely with the New York-based gallery’s mantra: Collect wisely. “There is a lot of wealth here, a bit like Brazil,” Kelly told Artnet News. “Mexican collectors use their knowledge and education. They are not flashy.” He expects many to return at the weekend to make their purchases, although early sales already included a sculpture by Antony Gormley and pieces by Jose Dávila. There was special interest from collectors and curators in the Mexican artist’s elegant stone-and-glass sculpture, priced at \$150,000, offset by a vibrant, large-scale graphic work, both *Untitled* (2020).

Opening day business was also brisk at Pace. The gallery found buyers for a Loie Hollowell painting, a Joel Shapiro sculpture, a mirror work by Song Dong, and a James Turrell hologram. (Prices were not disclosed.) Zona Maco newbies Xavier Hufkens of Brussels set out its stall with a solo presentation of work by Matt Connors. After testing the water in Mexico City, the gallery will head north of the border to show at Frieze LA next week.

José Kuri sounded upbeat after the uncertainties of 2019. The co-founder of Kurimanzutto—perhaps the leading gallery in Mexico City, which now also has a New York space—reported a strong start at Zona Maco. Allora & Calzadilla’s creepy, petrified petrol pump dominated the booth. Part of a series first shown at the Venice Biennale in 2011, it feels as timely as ever.

The number of acquisitive collectors and interested curators at Zona Maco also bodes well for the Material Art Fair, which opened Thursday. Kurimanzutto, along with Mexican heavy hitters Labor and OMR, have booths at both fairs. Gabriel Orozco has created a standout installation for Kurimanzutto at Material. Called *Tracing Money* (2020) it features an array of paper bills, plus drawings and transparencies of small details that have caught the eye of the Mexico- and Japan-based artist. A comment on the fluctuating value of paper money, it would be ideal for a museum anxious about the value of its endowment (or the intricacies of ethical fundraising). Individual drawings and photographs are priced at \$15,000 and \$1,500, respectively.