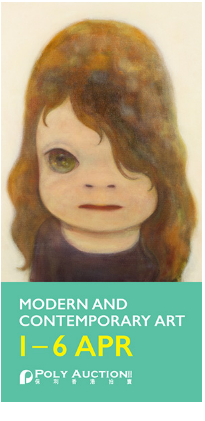
Reviews

I've Been to a Lot of Gallery Weekends. Vienna's 'Curated By' Festival Was the Most Cohesive and Moving I've Seen

Participants platformed artists from Ukraine and the surrounding region.

Kate Brown, September 22, 2022



ENDRE TÓT *Hopes in the Nothing*, (1980/1994). Courtesy acb Gallery, Budapest, Christine König Galerie, Vienna and the artist. Photo: Dávid Tóth

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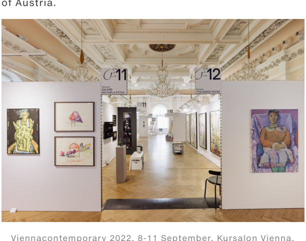
The resplendent chandeliers of Vienna's Kursalon concert hall clashed with the lonely figures by Maria Sulymenko on view at the Vienna Contemporary fair. Standing in the booth of Ukraine's Voloshyn Gallery, assistant Anna Kopylova and I had quick aside about her travels. She had driven for 30 hours from Kyiv, where, at the beginning of the war with Russia, she spent weeks living in the gallery. It is mostly underground, making it an ideal bomb shelter.

I was haunted by a remark I had made the night before, lightly complaining over dinner about my seven-hour train ride from Berlin to attend of Vienna Contemporary and Curated By, a city-wide art festival that is, to quote one collector, "unique in the world." It's true: for 14 editions, this innovative model sees 24 dealers, with €9,000 in city funding, turn over their spaces to external curators who often hail from museums beyond Austria. Each organizes a single show that reflects on one umbrella theme.

With an eye toward the ongoing war a 30-hour drive away, this year's concept was *kelet*, Hungarian for "east." (In case the psychological rift in Europe is not clear enough, the theme last year was humor.) Participating galleries each absorb the prompt differently, though in the case of *kelet*, many took it literally, opting to invite curators from longitudes east of Austria.



Viennacontemporary 2022. 8-11 September, Kursalon Vienna. Photo courtesy of: kunstdokumentation.com

Even without such a specific ask, Vienna's art scene has long looked toward that horizon. Vienna Contemporary, held earlier this month, and the newer fair Spark, which takes place in the summer, both feature an array of galleries from central and eastern Europe.

At Vienna Contemporary, one of the newcomers this year was Bucharest gallery Sandwich, a small artist-run space quite literally *sandwiched* between two buildings. The Romanian dealer showed small ceramic works based on a combination of folkloric myths and real political events by Ukrainian artist Diana Khalilova. On another floor, Ukrainian galleries Voloshyn and Kyiv's Naked Room exhibited for free.

Vienna and its cultural scene are a gateway between these European geographies and identities of east and west, however loaded the terms are. ("Every mention of east and west is accompanied by scare quotes," noted Chicago-based curator of Curated By, Dieter Roelstraete, in his opening address.) However you want to slice Europe, Vienna is a town that looks like a polished jewel of old empire where you will hear Slavic languages almost as much as German on the streets. People, culture, and ideas flow from Bratislava and Budapest just as much as from western capitals of comparable sizes.

Still, talk of east and west is a bit of a political game in Vienna, especially since the outbreak of war. Austria is pervaded by a "spooking kind of quiet" when it comes to solidarity with Ukraine, as one dealer put it. (The events were quieter too, with few to no Russian collectors.) In the not-so-distant past, this country was far from immune to Russian influence, money, and energy. And in the present, the nation has remained suspiciously neutral in a war with one aggressor.

As such, the concept for Curated By, crafted by Dieter Roelstraete back in March (while Europe was still frozen in a collective gasp), carries a particular weight. Lithuanian curator Valentinas Klimasauskas commented that this year's focus is, in a sense, a "gesture of art historical or curatorial justice."

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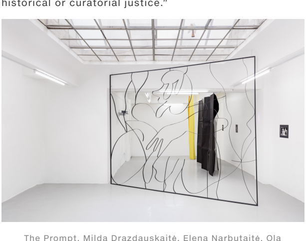
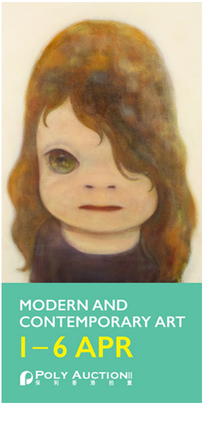


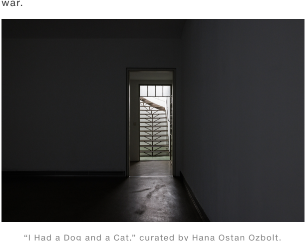
The Prompt. Milda Drazdauskaitė, Elena Narbutaitė, Ola Vasiljeva, curated by Adomas Narkevičius, installation view GIANNI MANHATTAN (2022), courtesy the artists and GIANNI MANHATTAN, photo: kunst-dokumentation.com



Kelet was, in some cases, gently rebutted by curators who deemed it too simplistic: Adomas Narkevičius, who organized an exhibition of Lithuanian and Latvian artists at Gianni Manhattan, said he hoped to "react without responding." His exhibition, with artists Milda Drazdauskaitė, Elena Narbutaitė, and Ola Vasiljeva, is cheekily called "The Prompt." It examines the limits any sense of knowing, with minimal materials role-playing as something else. Supple-looking drapes of hanging paper obfuscate the view, and a laser light creates a pinkish-blue "cut" in the wall.

Austrians seem to be well aware of the weird place they occupy now. Until recently, cheap Russian gas accounted for 80 percent of its energy. Europeans are panicking about the impending winter, and what it will mean for the economy (and what that, in turn, will mean for empathy for Ukraine). These same fears are deeply felt in the art world, with its big bright rooms that are costly to heat in a business with tight cash flow.

This anxiety underpinned two exhibitions, including that of Galerie Georg Kargl, curated by Hana Ostan Ožbolt, where the lights were completely off in the gallery. Small sculptures, including meticulously wrought readymades by David Fesl, punctuated an otherwise somber space. At Galerie Crone, the front of the gallery was also darkened in a show curated by Eva Kraus, director of the Bundeskunsthalle Bonn, and Ukrainian artist Volo Bevza. The natural shadows deepened the poignant mood of an exhibition that included young, contemporary Ukrainian artists reflecting on the relationship between virtual and physical realities of war.



"I Had a Dog and a Cat," curated by Hana Ostan Ozbolt. Installation view. 2022. Courtesy Georg Kargl Fine Arts. © Georg Kargl Fine. Photo kunst-dokumentation.com.

Particularly impactful was a large, standalone sculpture of a broadsheet by Yevgenia Belorusets. Placed in the middle of the room, the sculpture, called *Please don't take my picture! Or they'll shoot me tomorrow*, is printed with stories written by the artist that play with fact and fiction. The blown-up newspaper encompasses the split personality of media coverage around this war. I was struck by its date: 2015, one year after war officially began in Crimea. It was a time when Russian state money still enjoyed prominent status in the art world under the guise of promoting international exchange. Belorusets's work punctures that myth and offers a very different picture.

After circulating unknowable amounts of fairs and gallery weekends in recent years, they can begin to feel cacophonous. By contrast, Curated By hangs together in a way that is hybridized, varied, legible, and not pedantic. Although some contributors gently ignored the brief, all participants agreed it was no time for flashy works but instead an opportunity for muted reflection. There was some sense of a collective subconscious: in times of deep trouble, and where words fail us, art fills a void.

Installation view. "The Neverending Eye," Croy Nielsen, Vienna, 2022. Courtesy Croy Nielsen, Vienna. Photo: Kunst-dokumentation.com

The most successful exhibitions opted to gaze beyond the immediate crisis, tracing a thread between the current war and longer plots. It's essential not to reduce Ukrainian artists to the experience of this war and the refugee crisis, Polish curator from the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Natalia Sielewicz, pointed out as she gave a tour of "The Neverending Eye."

The solo exhibition at Croy Nielsen features works saved from Ukraine by the late Fedir Tetyanych. The pioneer of Ukrainian cosmism worked as a state artist for Soviet Ukraine. His works engage in double-speak: they are both historical champions of the Soviet era and also transgressive attempts to imagine worlds and ways beyond it.

His "biotechnospheres," futuristic utopian shelters of his own invention, are depicted in watercolors that were nearly lost to history before a dedicated group of "eastern" Europeans saved them during the onset of war. They hang now in Vienna, as dashed dreams from the past. The futuristic machines are set against lush Ukrainian fields that we now see with new eyes—a fertile, fragile ground.

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Auctions

Energy Exec Roger Sant's $50 Million Collection, With Major Works by Gauguin and Joan Mitchell, Heads to Christie's This Fall

Proceeds from the sale will benefit Sant's nonprofit Summit Foundation.

Vittoria Benzine, September 22, 2022

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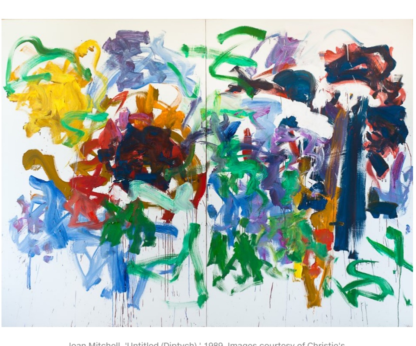

Joan Mitchell, 'Untitled (Diptych),' 1989. Images courtesy of Christie's.

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November's fall marquee sales at Christie's New York just got a little extra voltage. The house just announced that it will sell 30 works from the collection of 91-year-old energy executive Roger Sant—valued at $50 million at least—across several forthcoming auctions.

Two standout works, painted a century apart, headline the partnership: Paul Gauguin's *Pêcheur et baigneurs sur l'Aven* (1888), which is expected to fetch $6 million to $8 million, and Joan Mitchell's *Untitled (Diptych)* (ca. 1989), estimated to fetch $10 million to $15 million.

Paul Gauguin, *'Pêcheur et baigneurs sur l'Aven'* (1888).

Beyond those two blockbusters, Sant's collection ranges from France's Pont-Aven school to Modern, Modern and contemporary masters, including Wayne Thiebaud, Ellsworth Kelly, Donald Judd, and Isamu Noguchi.

"These works of art illustrate Roger's impeccable eye toward quality and beauty," said Sara Friedlander, Christie's deputy chairman of postwar and contemporary art, in a statement.

Sant, who is chairman emeritus of the Virginia-based Applied Electrical Services Corporation, has also made institutional gifts, such as a major 2019 donation of pictures from the Nabis artists to the Phillips Collection.

Bill Gates speaks with Roger Sant ,before participating in a question-and-answer discussion with David Rubenstein, President of the Economic Club of Washington. NICHOLAS KAMM/AFP via Getty Images.

Sant also created his family's private Summit Foundation in 1991 "to promote the health and well-being of the planet." Proceeds from the Christie's sale will benefit the foundation and its three core initiatives: female empowerment, the restoration of the Mesoamerican Reef ecosystem, and sustainability across American cities.

"People can thrive and nature can flourish," Sant said in a statement. "At the Summit Foundation, we believe this to our core. For over 30 years, the foundation has been innovating to develop sustainable practices globally, with the mission of creating a better future for the planet and all its inhabitants."

Works from his collection will tour through Hong Kong, San Francisco, Los Angeles, London, and the Hamptons starting on October 5, through the sales' start dates in November.

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On View

In Pictures: A New Blockbuster Show in Paris Reveals the Surprising—and Utterly Convincing—Connections Between Claude Monet and Joan Mitchell

Some 60 works explore a rich dialogue across time between the two artists.

Jo Lawson-Tancred, October 25, 2022

Joan Mitchell, *Two Pianos* (1980). Photo: © Patrice Schmidt, courtesy of © The Estate of Joan Mitchell.

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We often hear about how the Impressionists' break with tradition paved the way for Modern art. But since the works of each movement tend to be siphoned off into separate galleries, we rarely get a chance to connect the dots ourselves.

This fall, the Fondation Louis Vuitton is presenting a unique dialogue between the works of Monet, one of the best known Impressionists from Paris, and Joan Mitchell, a leading light of Abstract Expressionism working many decades later in the U.S. The melting away of chronological distinctions has been heightened by taking the works by Monet out of their ormolu frames, creating a timeless effect and bringing attention to the works' formal characteristics.

The famous "Water Lilies" by Monet, who died just one year after Mitchell's birth, in 1925, became widely known in America during the 1950s. They were clearly of interest to Mitchell, who took part in two exhibitions of so-called "abstract impressionist" work in 1957 and 1958.

The connection between the two artists became particularly strong after 1968, when Mitchell moved to Vétheuil, the commune on the banks of the Seine where Monet lived and worked between 1878 and 1881. The region's natural surroundings became a crucial source of inspiration for both artists, though each used real life only as a starting point to create highly moving and evocative studies reflective of their unique eye and experiences.

The show presents 36 works by Monet side by side with 24 works by Mitchell. Those hoping to learn more about the latter's life and work can also visit a special retrospective running simultaneously in the lower floor of the building.

"Monet-Mitchell" is on display at Fondation Louis Vuitton until February 27, 2023. See some of the paintings included in the show below.

Installation view of "Monet-Mitchell" at Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris. Photo courtesy of Fondation Louis Vuitton.

Claude Monet, *The Garden at Giverny* (1922-26). Photo courtesy of Musee Marmottan, Paris.

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Joan Mitchell *La Grande Vallee* (1983). Photo by © Primae / Louis Bourjac, courtesy of © The Estate of Joan Mitchell.

Installation view of "Monet-Mitchell" at Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris. Photo courtesy of Fondation Louis Vuitton.

Claude Monet, *Nymphéas* (1916-1919). Photo courtesy of Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris.

Joan Mitchell, *Quatuor II for Betsy Jolas* (1976). Photo courtesy of Joan Mitchell Foundation © The Estate of Joan Mitchell.

Installation view of "Monet-Mitchell" at Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris. Photo courtesy of Fondation Louis Vuitton.

Claude Monet, *Agapanthus* (1916-1919). Photo courtesy of Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris.

Joan Mitchell, *La Grande Vallée XIV (For a Little While)* (1983). Photo courtesy of Joan Mitchell, *La Grande Vallée XIV (For a Little While)* (1983). Photo: Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris © The Estate of Joan Mitchell.

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