



Art market
News

The art fair season kicks off in Asia: here is your guide

From Shenzhen to Shanghai, Hong Kong to Beijing, this autumn is awash with events despite border closures and long quarantines

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Unscheduled Hong Kong in 2020
Photo courtesy of HKAGA and Felix Wong

China is gearing up for another autumn art season even as border closures and long quarantines remain in place for a second year. The 2020 autumn fairs and auctions around the region, particularly in Shanghai in November, returned in robust health after a beleaguered pandemic year. The 2021 season is set to be a bellwether of whether the transitional model reliant on local markets can be sustained until the distant day that regular international travel resumes.

September kicked off in the Pearl River Delta with the returns of **Unscheduled Hong Kong** (2-6 September) and the ninth **Art Shenzhen** (9-12 September). Unscheduled, a local galleries showcase created in June 2020 by the Hong Kong Art Gallery Association, this year moved to a 20,000 sq ft empty Central retail space on Queen's Road (previously home to Topshop) and will next host the inaugural NFT-centred **Digital Art Fair Asia** (30 September-17 October).

The inaugural **DnA Shenzhen Design and Art Fair** (30 September-4 October) brings 34 art and design galleries to the city's Museum of Contemporary Art and Urban Planning and is organised by the team behind Art021 in Shanghai and JingArt in Beijing. "Shenzhen is intrinsically the kind of place where you have to be proactive," says the fair's co-founder Kylie Ying. "The economy and everything are already very developed, so the fair needs to tap into the power of culture and design."



Unscheduled Hong Kong was held this year in a former TopShop
Courtesy of Unscheduled HK

The calendar continues with Hong Kong's **Fine Art Asia** (8-11 October) and the **Beijing Contemporary Art Expo** (**Beijing Dangdai in Mandarin**, 13-17 October). Shanghai's November fairs have now expanded to four, with **Design Miami/Podium x Shanghai** (4-14 November) debuting and **Photofairs Shanghai** (3-6 November), rescheduled from 23 to 26 September, joining headliners **Art021** and the **West Bund Art & Design Fair** (both 11-14 November).

Art021 and West Bund both aim to resume their pre-Covid scale, and though their rosters were not announced before going to press, a West Bund spokesperson confirmed it would include "more than 120 leading galleries, designer brands and art institutions" expanding from the previous A and B halls of the West Bund Art & Design Centre to the West Bund Dome, a cavernous converted cement factory mostly used for performing arts. While the Yangtze Nanjing Contemporary Art Fair, held the past three Octobers, has cancelled for this year, the Jiangsu capital will still hold the state-backed [Nanjing Art Fair International](#) (26-29 November).

Hong Kong travellers to the mainland still must undergo three week quarantines; Hong Kong has lifted quarantine for arrivals from mainland China, but both territories issue very few visas to external visitors. "The Hong Kong art market is still strong, as witnessed in the buoyant sales at art fairs which resumed in Hong Kong this year," says Fine Art Asia founder and director Andy Hei. "Collectors, both new and established, are very eager to find and buy high quality art. Fine Art Asia is sadly unable to welcome overseas galleries this year, due to travel restrictions, but we have received many enquiries from leading Hong Kong galleries who are keen to participate in the fair. This shows that galleries see a powerful potential buying trend from collectors." Its 2020 partnership with Art Basel in Hong Kong will not continue this year, as ABHK proceeded in the city this spring.



Wang Bing, 遗存的影像—铁西区 (2001) at Photofairs Shanghai
Courtesy of West Gallery

Photofairs Shanghai, originally scheduled to run in September, has been postponed due to fears that a fresh wave of Covid-19 infections in early September would expand nationwide, though the events in Shenzhen forged ahead. "Of course we were absolutely ready to follow government guidelines as we knew it could be a fluid situation," says the fair director Georgia Griffiths. "We had a back-up plan in place as is prudent during such a time and when we learned of the government's guidelines were able to change tack quickly to that plan. The new dates reflected our thinking that in fact there was also great merit in having the Shanghai fairs closer together to build momentum for each other and the city's art scene."

Griffiths says the fair expects to return in September 2022, but says the dense month "builds a great momentum and incentivises collectors and curators from across China to visit Shanghai for these two major art weeks." Cancelled in 2020, the fair instead cooperated with spaces in the city to hold coordinated photography events last September, a practice they hope to continue.

Griffiths believes that photography's accessible entry price point gels well with a worldwide market spending more time within homes they wish to enliven. In China, she also believes "that the lack of travel has allowed for people to refocus on what is going on locally and celebrate this. The photography scene in China is really fantastic and doing cutting-edge work so it is great to see more attention being paid" to its photography galleries and artists, including from lesser-known cities like Changsha, Chengdu and Suzhou.

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