

## Italian gallerists join remote ranks in Hong Kong

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A collective booth of leading Italian dealers is among the galleries participating remotely at Art Basel Hong Kong this year

Stefano Fossati, the director of the Italian Cultural Institute in Hong Kong, outlines eloquently why a collective booth shared by eight leading Italian galleries at Art Basel Hong Kong matters. Under the banner “Italians”, the phalanx of dealers will present works in real life by key modern and contemporary artists such as Giorgio Morandi, Lucio Fontana, Paola Pivi and Francesco Vezzoli, bringing a slice of Italy to the city’s Convention and Exhibition Centre.

“I think that this event will not only present the most interesting artists in one space . . . but [also] give a critical overview of [Italy’s] artistic production. It is a balanced blend of high culture and business,” he says.

At Art Basel Hong Kong, 56 galleries - out of a total of 104 - have applied for the “satellite booth” option, a number that exceeded expectations, says Adeline Ooi, Art Basel Asia’s director. Galleries are going remote for different reasons, she says, from “trying this experiment together” to bringing important works to audiences in real life. These booths fall into two price brackets: smaller stands measuring between 15 and 20 square metres cost \$9,500; larger booths up to 25 square metres cost \$11,500. “You get a set of walls, lights and a booth assistant [included in the fee]. This is heavily subsidised, but it’s all about getting the dealers as close to the convention centre as possible,” Ooi says.

The on-site assistants are not expected to engage with sales. Galleries will stay linked online to home base; every participant will supply QR codes with details of works and cross-continent video calls will be encouraged. More bullish dealers have even decided to increase their initial offering and hire bigger booths.

But the remote approach is not for everyone. “We understand that some galleries are not comfortable leaving their works to be looked after by others so we are surprised to welcome over half of the galleries signing up for satellite booths,” Ooi says. Whether this exact model will be replicated at Art Basel in Basel, which is still due to take place in September, will be decided closer to the date, she adds. “It’s always important to evaluate new approaches,” Ooi says.



'Per Morandi' (2020) by Bertozzi & Casoni at Galleria d'Arte Maggiore g.a.m © Courtesy Galleria d'Arte Maggiore g.a.m., Bologna/Milano/Paris



Franco Calarota, chair of Galleria d'Arte Maggiore G.A.M. stresses that direct contact with collectors remains essential while satellite booths could be “an emergency solution in an exceptional year”. Meanwhile, Nicolo Cardi,

The project — part of a wider cultural programme in Hong Kong and Macau called “Italian Style” — is a masterstroke of cultural diplomacy. Fossati emphasises that the Italian Cultural Institute is an office of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in China; €150m has been set aside by the Italian government to “support companies in their international activities”, he says. “Art galleries are private companies that play an important role in promoting Italian culture.”

“Italians” curator Cavallucci heralds the move as “very important in terms of cultural policy [as] the world of culture, especially in Italy, often views market operations suspiciously”. He will organise the joint booth, grouping the works “through juxtapositions, contrasts and interconnections” so as to “define the features of Italian style”.

Initially Fossati was keen to host an exhibition of Italian contemporary art at the Hong Kong Arts Centre to coincide with Art Basel. He describes over email how the plan was scuppered by the Covid-19 pandemic. “We decided [instead] to hire a booth inside [the fair] and offer it to the galleries on the condition that they only bring Italian art,” he says. The Italian Cultural Institute subsequently stepped up, covering all stand expenses including rental and shipping costs.

Galleria d'Arte Maggiore G.A.M. of Milan will show a selection of blue-chip paintings by the 20th-century master Giorgio Morandi (\$750,000-\$1m) in dialogue with sculptures by the contemporary Italian duo Bertozzi & Casoni (\$30,000-\$50,000).