

## Basel's Trend-Setting Liste Art Fair Feels Safe This Year

Both the art market and the event are in a transitional moment. 'It's not an easy time for galleries,' one of its co-founders said.



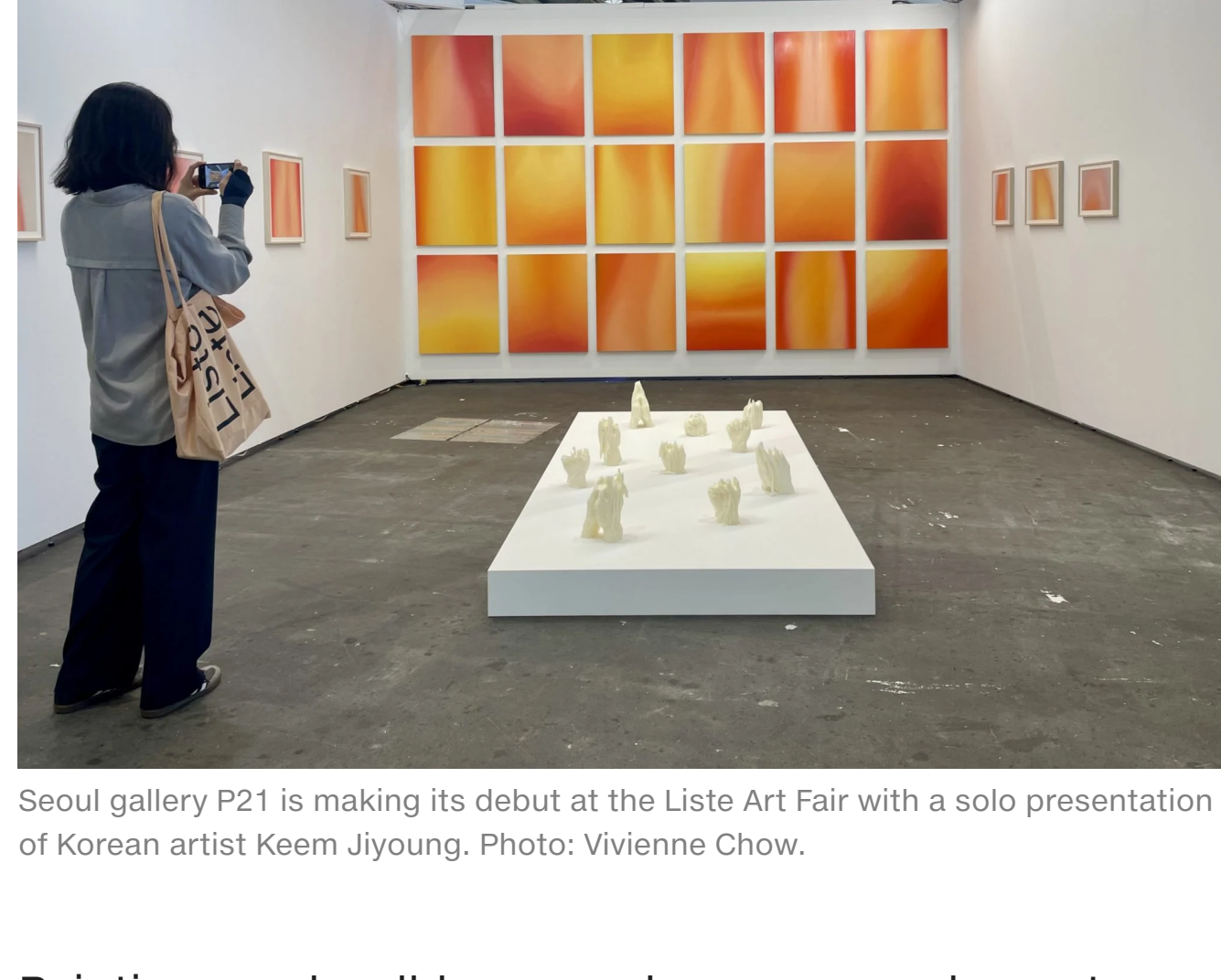
Šelda Puķīte, the curator of Kogo gallery in Tartu, Estonia, said that she has become a “walking performative painting,” wearing a tracksuit by artist Elina Vitola, who is having a solo presentation at her gallery's booth at the Liste Art Fair. Photo: Vivienne Chow

Vivienne Chow • June 10, 2024 • [Share This Article](#)

For nearly three decades, the Liste Art Fair in Basel, Switzerland, has been the curtain raiser for one of the most important weeks on the art world's calendar and the go-to place for young and daring galleries to show cutting-edge works. This year, though, the displays look very safe, suggesting that dealers are being cautious in a tough market.

When Liste opened its 29th edition today at 11 a.m., collectors and industry professionals, most from Europe and Asia, were present, fresh from [Zurich Art Weekend](#) or their morning flights. The fair is once again running in Hall 1.1 at the Messe Basel, to which it moved from the cramped former Wardeck brewery in 2021, and 91 galleries from 35 countries are on hand (slightly up from last year's 88 exhibitors). Among them are 23 newcomers, including two Seoul outfits, P21 and Cylinder, the first South Korean galleries to participate, and Rose Easton, from London.

Some exhibitors made sales in the first few hours, but others said that business was slower than usual at this moment of global economic and political uncertainties, which have been heightened by the far right's strong showing in the [European Parliament elections](#) on Sunday.



Seoul gallery P21 is making its debut at the Liste Art Fair with a solo presentation of Korean artist Keem Jiyoung. Photo: Vivienne Chow.

Paintings and wall-hung works are everywhere at Liste, and while there are sculptures and small installations, video and kinetic pieces are scarce compared to previous editions.

“It's not an easy time for galleries,” said Liste co-founder Peter Bläuer, who has managed the fair since its start in 1996. This year, the fair chose not to raise its booth fees, which start at CHF 6,800 (about \$7,600). “The atmosphere is challenging,” he said. “There is a war going on in Europe. But we will see. There have always been crises, but collectors will always buy.”

The fair went through a major management reorganization over the past year, implementing a new co-director system. Reto Nussbaum was named its commercial director last October, while Bläuer, 72, became interim artistic director (despite having retired), after Joanna Kamm left the job in February.

Although the fair runs through Sunday, it already feels like it is preparing for its 30th-anniversary edition in 2025. It said today that it has tapped Nikola Dietrich as its [new artistic director](#); she starts September 1. And Nussbaum said that Liste has decided to stay in the Messe Basel, where booths are arrayed in a huge circle. “Most galleries prefer this location,” he said. “We have decided that this democratic arrangement of booths can create spaces where people can hang out.”



Installation view of Margot Samel's solo booth featuring works by Melissa Joseph. Photo: Vivienne Chow.

It may be a transition year for both Liste and the art market, but there is plenty of art on offer that speaks to the present. There are 70 solo booths, Bläuer noted, proudly. “It's like 70 small shows. Lots of curators come to the fair. It is a risk for galleries, but on the other hand, it's a way to introduce artists.”

What is on the minds of those artists? Geopolitical, historical, and ecological questions, according to Bläuer. “There are also works looking at technology and questioning paintings as a form of medium of our times.”

The Voloshyn Gallery, which is based in Kyiv and Miami, has a politically charged solo presentation from Abi Shehu (b. 1993, Lezha, Albania) that includes a video installation of animated drawings found in an old prison in Albania and a series of sculptures inspired by her father's emigration to Greece, fleeing communist rule there. Works, priced between €5,300 (\$5,700) and €18,000 (\$19,400), have received interests from institutions, the gallery said.

Tabula Rasa, of Beijing and London, is presenting “The Organology of the World,” a solo display by Musiquiqui Chihying, who is based in Taipei and Berlin. His elaborate video installation and drawings address the power dynamics of technology, A.I., and forgotten histories of Afro-Asian communities. The gallery sold several drawings, priced at €2,800 (\$3,000) each, to collectors with a tech background—fitting homes for works that depict a cross-section of a submarine cable in Mauritian waters.

Temnikova and Kasela, visiting from Tallinn, Estonia, is exhibiting two female artists from the country: Edith Karlson, who is representing Estonia at the Venice Biennale this year, and Flo Kasearu. Their wall-hung works and sculptures are priced between €2,900 (\$3,100) and €25,000 (\$26,900), and the gallery sold several in advance, dealer Olga Temnikova said.



Installation view of Yutaka Kikutake's booth at Liste Art Fair 2024. Photo: Vivienne Chow.

The booth also has a tiny sculpture in the shape of a tick (a nod to the country's recent tick outbreak) by the Riga-based Kasearu. Another of her ticks is present in the booth of fellow Estonian gallery Kogo, which is headquartered in Tartu and presenting a solo booth of work by Elaine Vitola. Vitola has covered Kogo's booth in canvas and added a zipper, turning it into “walk-in” painting, so that any object in the booth could be read as a painting, according to the gallery's curator, Šelda Puķīte (including the tracksuit she was wearing, which was designed by the artist).

“It's also a self-commentary work,” Puķīte said. “By inviting people to *enter* the painting, it's also saying that you have to be an insider in the art world” in order to get ahead. At trend-setting Liste, which remains a key proving ground for emerging talents, those are words to live by.