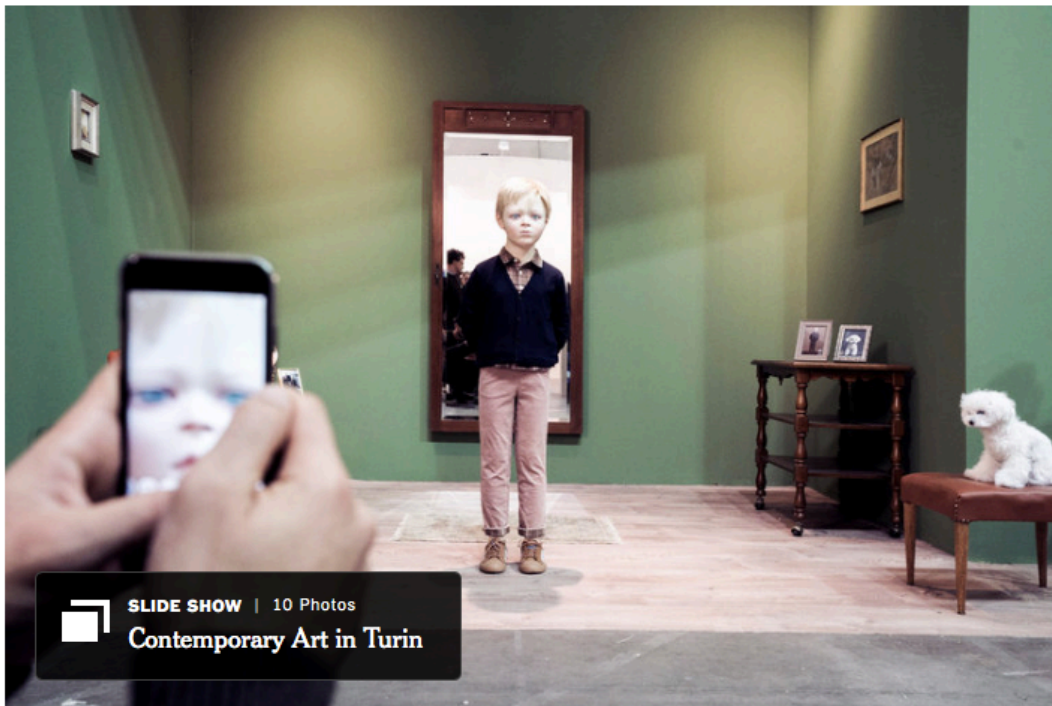


# The New York Times

## ART & DESIGN

### In the Shadow of Art Basel and Frieze

By SCOTT REYBURN NOV. 11, 2016



Alessandro Grassani for The New York Times

TURIN, Italy — Art and truffles.

It might not seem the most obvious combination, but at this time of year both are in season in Turin, the stately capital of the Piedmont region in northwest Italy.

For an extra \$25 or so, lunch at the 23rd edition of the Artissima art fair, which ran Nov. 4- 6, could be made more memorable with shavings of an ascomycete fungus unearthed from local forests.

These days, however, it takes more than a famous autumnal delicacy to lure the art world's frequent fliers to events that aren't quite on the must-attend level of [Art Basel](#) or Frieze in London.

This is why Artissima, Italy's best-known contemporary art fair, like so many such "second-tier" events, emphasizes the internationality of its exhibitors and the seriousness of its curation. This year's edition, held for the eighth time in the Oval, a glazed structure built for the 2006 Winter Olympics, featured 193 dealers, 65 percent of whom have spaces outside of Italy. The fair's various sections — which included emerging galleries, special projects and performances, as well as rediscovered and emerging artists — attracted 50,000 visitors over the four days (including a VIP preview), according to a post-fair release issued by Artissima, which is owned and promoted by three local government authorities. Art Basel and Frieze each attract about 100,000 over five days.

"The fair was undoubtedly good, but Artissima can do more," said Vincenzo Gangone, a sales consultant at the Milan-based Primo Marella gallery, which was exhibiting at the event for the third time. "The organizers are happy for the quantity of the public, but what about the quality?" he added, alluding to the dearth of wealthy foreign buyers at the fair. Mr. Gangone described sales as "average" with collectors looking for "budget friendly" works in the 5,000 euro to 20,000 euro range, or about \$5,500 to \$23,000.

This is not a price point that excites major international galleries such as Gagosian, Pace, David Zwirner or White Cube, none of which have participated in Artissima.

Although it might not have the commercial clout of the top-tier fairs, Artissima does attract curators and collectors from outside of Italy, who also want to visit Turin's highly regarded contemporary art foundations and museums. The contemporary art committee of the Philadelphia Museum of Art was in town, as were Poju and Anita Zabłudowicz, collectors who have their own art foundation in London.

"We were immersed in a good old-fashioned art fair where the galleries were serious and the art was engaging," Ms. Zabłudowicz said after her first visit to Artissima.

Ms. Zabłudowicz would not divulge any purchases, but an as-yet-unnamed Italian private museum bought “Secure for Now,” a new installation by the provocative Chinese hyper-realist sculptor Li Wei, at Marella’s booth. The work, a unique variant from an edition of five, priced at €48,000, consists of a boy standing with his hands behind his back in a room next to his favorite fluffy dog toy. A mirror on the rear wall reveals the boy has his finger in the pin of a grenade.

The Hamburg dealer Galerie Sfeir-Semler was offering one of about 140 Murano glass marionettes that the Egyptian artist Wael Shawky used in 2015 in the third installment of his “Cabaret Crusades” video series, narrated from an Arab perspective. The videos were being shown — along with other, more recent sculptures by the artist — in a one-man exhibition at the Castello di Rivoli museum of contemporary art in the former residence of the dukes of Savoy.

Sfeir-Semler sold one of the marionettes, priced at \$65,000, to a collector based in Monaco. The video itself, titled “The Secrets of Karbala,” from an edition of seven with two artist’s proofs, is priced at \$350,000. The Museum of Modern Art in New York and Qatar Museums have each bought the entire trilogy, according to the gallery’s owner, Andrée Sfeir-Semler.

“I have made sales, but I’m not sure I will do it again,” Ms. Sfeir-Semler said. “There are too many art fairs.”

Mr. Shawky (who also had a solo presentation of new work at the Fondazione Merz here) and the British digital artist Ed Atkins were the flavors of Artissima week. Mr. Atkins, voted number 50 in this year’s ArtReview Power 100, was showing high-definition video works outside of the fair, both at the Castello di Rivoli and at the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo.

Patrizia Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, based in Turin, has been Italy’s vanguard collector of video and new media art. Her foundation showed Mr. Atkins’s unsettling 2016 video “Safe Conduct” on multiple free-standing screens, allowing an impressively diverse crowd to watch with ease the CGI-generated protagonist rip off his face and put it in an airport security scanner tray.

The innovative quality of the video and digital art on show at Turin’s museums and foundations was not quite matched at the city’s art fair. At the same time, Artissima had few dealers offering significant 20th-century material, despite Turin being a center for the Arte Povera movement in the 1960s.

“We need galleries with more international clients” at the fair, said Luigi Mazzoleni, a director at Mazzoleni, a dealership with spaces in both Turin and London. His booth, however, did sell three 1970s minimalist abstracts by the Pittura Analitica artist Gianfranco Zappettini for as much as €100,000 each.

Mr. Mazzoleni said that demand for 20th-century Italian art was global, but was a domestic market in Italy itself, thanks to the country’s [stringent restrictions](#) on the export of art more than 50 years old.

After lobbying from the Italian art trade, these export regulations, dating from 1939, may be overhauled. A draft bill permitting the free trade of works less than 70 years old — virtually all postwar art — is in the process of being approved by the Italian Senate. The inclusion of a “safeguard clause” permitting officials to stop the export of works of exceptional cultural interest makes it likely that it will be ratified by the Chamber of Deputies, probably by next spring, according to Lorenzo Casini, legal counsel to Italy’s minister of culture.

The opening up of Italy’s market for postwar art might also tempt some of the world’s higher-powered galleries to exhibit at Artissima, if the fair chose to expand its definition of “contemporary” and offer more of the country’s much-coveted art of the 1960s and ’70s. This in turn might attract more foreign visitors.

“Our Turin visit was most gratifying and made us wonder at how hard it is to gain international attention,” said Ms. Zabłudowicz, the London art foundation owner. “Turin is often overlooked but is a world-class city for art.”

There is a balance to be struck between commerce and curation during Artissima week. If and when it is, Turin could gain a lot more attention. And not just for those truffles.