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Market Singapore

# Warhols, Warhols everywhere at Singapore fair

International names dominated, though sales were largely

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Art Stage Singapore 2015

Art Stage Singapore fair, which closed its fifth edition on 25 January, was the "flagship" of Southeast Asian contemporary art, and has grown into a convergence point for the emerging regions' art scenes. The fair is at the heart of a resurgence of art in Singapore since 2007 that has included the establishment of the gallery Billman Barracks in 2012, and this year sees the openings of the Gallery and Pinacotèque Museum Singapore. The veteran art dealer Jasdeep Sandhu says: "It has been phenomenal, Singapore has transformed from an artistic village to something quite urban."

Singapore Art Week stresses the Southeast Asian hub's cultural and artistic

offer this year, though, showed only a glimpse of Singapore's Southeast Asia's most vibrant and edgy artists. Mike HJ Chang's *Ar Wash* (2015), and Zaki Razak's performance *Amusing as to Death with Yusof Tony* (2015), were popular exceptions. But the most prominent art on show was by 20th-century Western names and established, traditional regional artists. There were Warhols, Warhols everywhere.

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Rudolf, the fair's founder and director, described the target as somewhat conservative, adding that Southeast Asia still lacks "real institutions to instill an appreciation of more conceptual art. The problem is not of context but of infrastructure, [galleries] promote what they can easily sell."

A spokeswoman at White Cube echoed his view: "It takes more time to [sell] [buyers] – compared with say Hong Kong, where people are more relaxed – but they are very curious and keen here."

The fair opened with the inaugural Joseph Balestier Award for the Best Young Artist of Art, presented by Art Stage and the US Embassy in Singapore. The award went to the Indonesian performance pioneer FX Harsono. The award provoked criticism for its low purse of \$5,000 and for its focus on investigating the issue of Singapore's intense censorship practices.

Art sales and attendance did not seem to be affected, however, with attendance strong and sales promising. The White Cube spokeswoman said, "The fair is slower compared with other fairs, but a bit better than years here." The gallery's Damien Hirst butterfly painting, sold for \$1.6m in 2008, was rumoured to be the largest sale of the fair at \$1.6m. The gallery, established in Singapore in 1996, claimed brisk sales for paintings by Malaysia's Ahmad Zakii Anwar. "Sales are good, but it's a bit slow in the economy around the world: pretty decent, not too sloppy," said Gajah, the owner of Gajah.

Art sales in general trended towards the regional, Rudolf says. "Buyers buy first what they know, then the international brands," he said, adding that the proliferation of multi-cultural artists in regional fairs, galleries, and museums has raised awareness.

Organisers say that 51,000 visitors came to the fair this year (up from around 45,700 at the VIP opening) up from last year's 45,700. An international presence punctuated the largely regional collectors, with many going to gallery representatives. Among the dense crowds of Singaporean students were superstar collectors including Singapore's Kenneth Choe, Malaysia's Bingley Iskandar, Robbie Antonio from the Philippines, the Indonesian-Chinese Budi Tek, and Japan's Miyatsu, as well as the Swiss collectors Uli Sigg and Michael Srauel's Serge Tiroche, the American Jorge Perez, and France's Chiara Rosenblum.

Rudolf says that the coveted Mainland Chinese collectors' presence was "slowly but surely." "More Chinese [buyers] come because they have money and flats here—and the [adjacent] casino helps a lot," he said.

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