

Power, space and fantasy: what to look out for at Art Basel 2023

Art Basel 2023 (15 – 18 June) unites site-specific pieces with large-scale installations

By Hannah Silver
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Nature, ecology, queer perspectives and quantum physics intertwine in a web of fantastical references at Art Basel 2023 (15 – 18 June), which this year unites 284 galleries, including 21 first-time participants.

Art Basel 2023: the highlights

Perspective is viewed through a historical lens at Unlimited, encompassing 76 large-scale installations curated by Giovanni Carmine, director of the Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen. From Monica Bonvicini's psychosexual study of how space leads behaviour in 'Never Again' (2005), to Firelei Báez's rethinking of the ruins of San-Souci Palace in northern Haiti, context and its power is celebrated in all forms.

Elsewhere, site-specific installations around the Münsterplatz and Basel's city centre are curated by Samuel Leuenberger as part of Parcours, the largest to date. 'Samuel Leuenberger, Parcours' curator has chosen a brilliant mix of projects which include both installation and site-specific projects and spread across locations including libraries, private meeting rooms financial institutions, domestic gardens, underground tunnels, bars, and even traffic roundabouts,' says director of Fairs and Exhibition Platforms, Vincenzo de Bellis. 'Highlights in Parcours this year include Jacolby Satterwhite's presentation with the support of Mitchell Innes & Nash explores themes of faith, mythology, rehabilitation, and spiritual acceptance through two video installations, a VR work and painting. There is also an exciting performance by the artist on Parcours Night on Saturday 17h June in the Museum der Kulturen in Munsterplatz. We are also looking forward to Melike Kara's immersive and site-specific installation, held in the UBS branch Aeschenvorstadt, which documents Kurdish culture through paintings and a series of photographic prints from her personal archive and open imagery.'

This year, the emphasis will also be on dialogue, with new sector Kabinett dedicated to presentations from artists including Anri Sala, Hugh Steers and Henrik Håkansson. 'Galleries are presenting works by artists exploring an extraordinary variety of themes and interests,' de Bellis adds. 'For example, there are queer perspectives: Alexander Gray Associates for the Kabinett sector will present the most extensive survey of the US painter Hugh Steers in Europe known for his allegorical work of 80s and 90s New York and who died of AIDS at the age 32; themes relating to fantasy and the imaginary are present: in Statements: Chapter NY will show Stella Zhong whose work is informed by astro-and quantum physics and also issues relating to nature and ecology will be on view: in Unlimited, Thaddeus Ropac will present Austrian artist Martha Jungwirth's 9m long triptych inspired by the animals that have perished in environmental disasters and those discovered in Tutenkhamun's tomb in 1922.'

For partner and global creative director at Hauser & Wirth, Neil Wenman, this year's fair is an opportunity to highlight links between long-standing themes in artists' work. 'Despite the change of form and colour, the message remains as relevant today as ever. The early painting 'Bartica' by Frank Bowling from 1968 feels as fresh today as it did the day it was made. His work is a constant source of inspiration for younger artists. This sense of continuation and learning is important for one to remember. To think about the urge to make, the desire of the artist to communicate.'

As well as a focus on emerging artists and new works from established artists, Hauser & Wirth will also consider Louise Bourgeois in a consideration of her rare and early works. 'The work of Louise Bourgeois always leaves me a little dumbfounded, her ability to express her most personal inner feelings is unbound,' Wenman says. 'Yet it's always important to see an origin of an idea and to understand that lightbulb moment when an artist puts down on the canvas a symbol or character that is to become a trope. The early painting 'One Way Traffic' by Bourgeois does just that. She flips between abstraction and figurations and jostles with form-making over mark-making to form the beginnings of what becomes her visual lexicon.'

Art Basel 2023 is open to the public June 15 - 18
artbasel.com