



Enjoy 3 issues for just £3 // **Subscribe today to start your subscription with the April bumper issue** [Subscribe today](#)

Art market // News

# Art Fair Philippines opens ‘proudly local’ 12th edition in new venue

This year 48 galleries take part in Manila's premier art fair

Lisa Movius

23 February 2025





Visitors to Art Fair Philippines 2025

Manila's art market remains "proudly local" says Trickey Colayco-Lopa, who cofounded Art Fair Philippines (AFP) in 2013. This year the fair moves from its original location in a carpark in Makati City's Link to tents in the nearby Ayala Triangle park, plus some spaces in the adjacent Mandarin Oriental hotel. Featuring 48 galleries, the fair is looking to bolster its position within the Philippines art world rather than appeal internationally, and Colayco-Lopa says the fair is not trying to appeal to Western blue chip galleries.

"Collectors here are more comfortable within a certain price range," of \$10,000 to \$20,000. "International galleries have their price points." The fair, she says, has a "core group" of participants that has held consistent over the years. Newcomers are largely invited by the regulars, which are 80% from the Philippines—and apart from two from Manila. She estimates the market to be 75%-85% paintings.

While Philippines and diaspora artists enjoy growing visibility in contemporary art globally, the local market remains quite traditional, with classical and modern Philippines art predominant. "In terms of value, masters and Modern are 80% of the market. But contemporary art has more sales volume," observes the dealer Jaime Ponce de León. The Philippines Modernism-focused Saturday auction of his León Gallery is, along with AFP, one of the pillars of the informal but lively Manila art season. "Contemporary here can be fad-driven, focused on the trendy and often buyers just copy each other," he says.

The Philippines economy has kicked in to gear, with 6.1% to 6.5% GDP growth, Asia's second highest after

Vietnam. Colayco-Lopa expresses uncertainty about how much that has spilled into the art market, “but we have seen some pleasant surprises with less known artists selling well.”

With a selling booth at AFP ahead of the auction, Ponce de León says that on opening day he sold a Nena Saguil painting to the artist Yola Perez Johnson for \$40,000. He reports active inquiries but no other confirmations. “With the high value secondary market art, we have to be patient.” Beyond economics, he observes, the local art market has gotten “more professionalised, standardised and transparent,” building more collector confidence.

This year’s Manila art week comes just ahead of a midterm senate election in May, and as vice president Sarah Duterte faces impeachment over corruption allegations. She is the daughter of recent strongman president Rodrigo Duterte; her backer turned rival president since 2022 and until 2028 Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos, Jr. is the son of the Philippines’ military dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr.

So far Marcos Jr. has largely held off on the violence of his predecessor, who clothed an aggressive crackdown in the auspices of a drug war, and of his father, who ruled the country from 1965 to 1986, including a martial law period between 1972 to 1981. Apart from a backpedalled book ban early in his term, and some other efforts to soften historical memories of the dictatorship, Marcos Jr has seemed largely neutral or positive towards art and culture, with his wife Liza Araneto Marcos promoting heritage restoration and attending some art events, including León’s auction preview earlier this week. “People are happy with the administration, there is a good mood” with the end of Duterte’s extrajudicial killings, says Ponce de León. Marcos Jr’s approval rating, while down from about 80% early on, remains at a solid 48%. “We hope that extends to the art market. Stable is good, and inflation has stabilised too.”

Ponce de León did find a silver lining for the art market in the Duterte years: “With the previous administration, the president was from the South, and many people in high positions were not from Manila. That led to strong interest, because they were new to art, with empty houses to fill. With the new administration, everyone is from old Manila families, and that segment of society has less demand,” as they largely have existing collections.

The mood was optimistic at AFP’s opening yesterday. Sales overall started slow, said several galleries, though a few more commercial dealers and crowd pleasing works did sell on opening day.

Unanimous support was expressed for the venue change. “We’re adjusting to the new venue, and like it so far—but let’s see. We are glad for the air conditioning, and it is less crowded,” says Mica Magsanoc, the head of publishing at the gallery and publisher Archivo 1984. The nearby gallery space is showing mid-1980s to early 1990s works by Philippines contemporary star Manuel Ocampo, who also has a large presentation in the Projects section. “He has a good market,” says Magsanoc. “So far there is a lot of interest, which we hope to translate to sales.”

Ocampo’s collages using Western pop imagery and cartoons to comment on colonialism and neocolonialism were among the most pointedly political works at this year’s AFP—which has seen a decline in topical works since the fair’s early years. “There are a lot fewer political statements in general,” says Colayco-Lopa. “It has

been happening gradually, maybe people just want to feel good - I am just guessing. It is less political with Duterte fatigue - and now there's more on environmental issues.”

“It’s not perfect, there are things to improve, but it has a feeling of possibility—it feels very good,” says Colayco-Lopa about the venue. “After 11 years with Link, we were ready for something new.” The fair lost about 1000 sq m in space with the change, and even less of the venue will be available after construction in the park completes. “2026 will require being imaginative.”

Manila’s art season this year also includes exhibitions of the local contemporary star Maria Taniguci at the Museum of Art and Design and the global star Pacita Abad at the Metropolitan Museum of Manila (both until 30 March), plus a spate of parties and gallery openings. Tomorrow’s León Gallery sale, which will in part raise funds for the Asian Cultural Council (ACC), is this year headlined by a work by Philippines-born Spanish artist Fernando Zóbel, whose family developed and owns much of Merkati. That includes the Ayala Museum, which has a contemporary art offshoot in the works, and which is currently showing *Zóbel: The Future of the Past* (until 23 February).

The Philippines diaspora looms large in the Philippines’ imagination as well as its art scene, with about 10 million of its 119 million people living abroad. That includes 4.5 million US-based Filipinos now vulnerable to anti-immigrant state and stochastic violence. Zóbel was among modern artist like Anita Magsaysay-Ho who emigrated, with Pacita Abad and her nephew Pio representing later waves of migrant and foreign-born Filipinos. “2024 was a banner year for Philippines art,” says Colayco-Lopa, with Pacita Abad at MoMA PS1, and David Medalla at the Hammer Museum, and Pio Abad’s nomination for the Turner Prize. While rising talents like Taniguchi and performance artist Eisa Jocson remain stateside, diaspora and émigré Filipino artists such as Josh Seraphina and Tosh Basco receive little exposure in Manila. As Colayco-Lopa says: “We don’t see a lot with them, but would like to do more.”

---

[Art market](#)

[Philippines](#)

[Metropolitan Museum, Manila](#)

[Art fairs](#)

---

[COOKIE SETTINGS](#)