

Lorenzo Rudolf

Responsible for creating a new and thriving model of art fairs in the 1990's, Lorenzo Rudolf is regarded as one of the most influential figures in global contemporary art. As the founder and Fair Director of Art Stage Singapore, 22-25 January 2015 at Marina Bay Sands Expo and Conventional Center in Singapore, now venturing into its fifth year as the premiere international art fair in Southeast Asia, his prowess in establishing successful annual art fairs into burgeoning markets is unsurpassed.

Born 1959 in Bern, Switzerland, Lorenzo studied law before beginning his career in 1988 in International Public Relations. In 1991 he was thrust into the art limelight as director of Art Basel, holding the position until 2000. Under his highly innovative leadership style the fair evolved into a global leader; the preeminent social and lifestyle event for collectors, celebrities and influencers. One of his platforms to success was in providing new and unrivalled levels of experiences to VIP guests.

-Why are you so passionate about art?

"I believe that if you are confronted by art intellectually and emotionally on a daily basis that means you are being challenged and that keeps you young. I grew up in Berne, Switzerland in an exciting era when the local Kunsthalle appointed its new director Harald Szeemann who immediately made a major impact. First he wrapped the exterior of the museum like a Christmas parcel and surprised everyone. Then he followed this up by the probably most influential exhibition in the history of contemporary art: "When Attitudes become Form". He showed us all that art is not only what you hang on walls or put on a pedestal, art is first of all an attitude, a language, it is both aesthetic and intellectual, and much more.

Szeemann was the first so-called exhibition maker and still today most of the worlds leading curators consider him as their godfather. He was the man who influenced me the most. From that point onwards art became almost like a virus for me. I then became an artist, however I realized that there were many more that were better than me."

Some years later I was the director of Art Basel and Szeemann was the only director of the Venice Biennale and our paths crossed again and we became friendly "competitors" who cultivated a constructive and supportive exchange.

-Now in its fifth year, what lessons have Art Stage Singapore learned along the way?

"One of the biggest lessons is learning respect for the different cultures, people and mentality's, and this is the most beautiful learning process. I like to create, so therefore you must be prepared to dig deeper under the surface to learn and reveal more. The more that is revealed the more open you become and the more you learn about the riches of life."

-What is your vision for Art Stage in 10 years time?

"The vision for Art Stage is to position it amongst the top 5 events in the world. Hong Kong and Singapore are the only truly multi cultural locations and the only two places predestined to host a globally relevant art fair. Art Stage is a very young brand and have a lot to learn, and time is on our side."

-As the global contemporary art market seems to be becoming saturated with art fairs, how can so many art fairs be sustained?

"We have to be careful not to create a market that is bigger than the demand and therefore we must carefully integrate Art Stage into the S.E. Asian environment. Many regional events are supporting and bringing up the market and are contributing through education. I am more than happy to have many events, yet it is always a question of what type of events."

“The market will eventually be flooded and the problem will be that there are too many that are similar. An art fair cannot just function to fill a perceived hole, a strong and unique concept is essential for success. We need diversity and we need events that analyse the market and make the right conclusions.”

“Art Stage can only survive in Singapore if we are at the heart of a healthy region so it is important that we support the market all levels of galleries and the industry. We have to show art in the right context and we have to educate the growing market, build it up and have a long-term approach.”

-What does Art Stage have to offer to keep ahead of the rising competition?

“We always have to be one step ahead of our main Asian competitor in Hong Kong, not copy, but be more creative and find new and exciting artists. We are creating our own identity, not competing but complementing. Asia is an emerging market, which needs interesting fairs on different levels and for different audiences.”

-How important are art collector’s packaged tours?

“Collectors today are used to being pampered and the approach that was initiated during my time at Art Basel was to create an entire new model and experiences targeted at the collectors. Collectors want specific programs. Art Stage needs to build up a non-commercial program while providing collectors unique experiences. It is very important that we work with others who share our vision and Singapore is a good place; there are museums, institutions, important collections and exhibitions as well.”

-Is there too much focus now upon the industry and collectors rather than the creators as the stars?

“We live in an ever-changing globalized world where contemporary art is driven by the market more than the academies. The emphasis is more towards artist’s rankings, with information portals delivering statistics from auctions and fairs. Therefore we have to build up brands as art fairs, galleries and artists. Yet Art Stage has the responsibility of educating the market and public because this essential factor is not coming from the public sector.”

-Do the Singapore and Hong Kong markets compliment each other?

“If Hong Kong is successful, Singapore will be successful and vice versa. There is much to learned from Hong Kong, even though it is purely market driven, while Singapore has a different market balance with institutions. What I want is a market defined by the academic part, then this is the biggest achievement.

-Does the art market need to diversify to encourage new collectors and buyers?

“We have an on going and increasing collectors base with many new first time buyers with art becoming more and more a lifestyle choice. We need diversity and we need more creativity.

-Do you think Indonesian art would benefit from taking a more self-critical approach?

“Everywhere art scenes have their complexities and challenges and must have a certain sense of self-criticism. Indonesia is a self-functioning eco system and now with the on set of globalization Indonesians see their chance to go international. Yet with a weak infrastructure in between two strong pillars (artists & collectors), without a strong gallery scene that is due to go international, some of the artists will never be competitive on the international market.”

-What should the Indonesian art industry be doing to help promote its artist’s potential internationally?

“Galleries must take more risks and act strategically to bring artist internationally to fairs and access international collectors. The domestic market strength in Indonesia has not encouraged the need to develop an international business model. The Indonesian state also supporting contemporary art would also be good, yet infrastructure must be strong. Over 20 years experience in art fairs reveals that galleries have to have a strong and defined image, and a concept and a strategy to position itself in the market in order to succeed.”

-Who do you see as the current success stories within the Indonesian and why?

“Indonesia is the strongest market in S.E. Asia because artists have a place in society. I have never experienced an art scene like in Indonesia, namely Yogyakarta, which is a very supportive scene where artists are supporting each other. Established artists build centers to support young artists. Normally such a supportive system does not work in the collectors scene, while here senior collectors tutor junior collectors, this is not typical.”

-Considering the role of major international players in Asia and other key locations in the globalization of contemporary art, is there a risk of the standardization of art under the appearance of hybridization? Can variety be preserved?

“We have to do everything to achieve a balance and be responsible for making a selection of what is saleable and what is good and that is important and we must give this to our audience. Without a gallery scene that is investing in young artists we will loose a lot of artists. Auction houses wont invest in them. In art fairs we sometimes discover artists who are outside of the galleries. We have to build the market and generate momentum while being orientated upon a vision and accompanying strategy.”

-Who in your opinion are the next generation of art impresarios?

“Auction houses using their powerful brands will build up a market dominance. Powerful private collectors within the market will begin to assert more influence within Asia. When these people begin to position their own Asian artists, such as the big Western collectors do with their Western stars, things begin to change. The new young generation, especially from the young emerging markets, who are wealthy, studied abroad, and grew up in an environment where contemporary art is a lifestyle and a status symbol will assert influence.”

-Many experts argue contemporary art needs to become more real, how can it do this?

“Often there is better marketing than educated people in the market, and the businessman has been able to dominate. The art world learned a lot from Charles Saatchi in the 90’s and the market followed his example and now many artists who know how to play this game as well.”

“There is a growing trend of more companies including artists within discussions and think tanks as they may not be able to provide the answers, yet they ask the important questions. Think tanks integrate artists with scientists and politicians and the same will occur in the public sector. Ultimately the goal will be to build more vibrant communities. Hopefully art will become more integrated into in the social and economic sectors and artists will be more active outside their studios engaging with the community.”

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