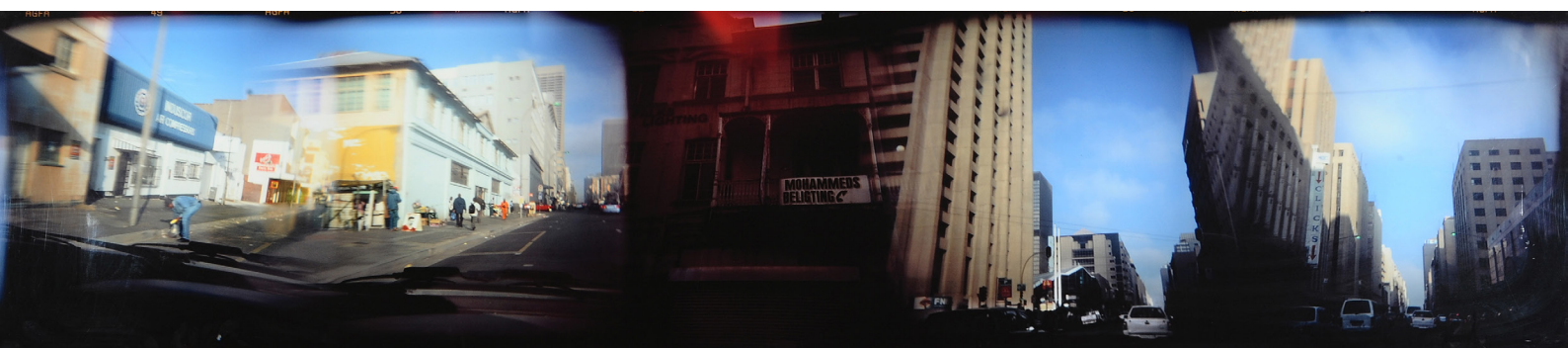


JOBURG ART FAIRS

2019 SNAP REPORT



COVER: JO RACTLIFFE, The Johannesburg Series (2000 - 2004)

Top:

Commissioner St; Sauer St Johannesburg Central; Sauer St cnr Bree St Newtown

Middle:

Commissioner St cnr Crown St JEPPESTOWN;

Commissioner St MARSHALTOWN;

Commissioner St cnr Smal St;

Commissioner St cnr Eloff St JOHANNESBURG CENTRAL

Bottom:

King George St; Twist St Joubert Park

Images courtesy the SABC Collection and the artist



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SMAC GALLERY BOOTH, ART JOBURG 2019 Courtesy Art Joburg Image by Karabo Mooki



INTRODUCTION

The art fairs that took place in Joburg, South Africa in September this year were the most talked about and anticipated since the first fair took place in this prominent African art capital in 2008. Instead of one fair in September, Joburgers, visitors and collectors could look forward to experiencing two in close proximity to each other. The Joburg Art Fair had changed hands and its new name, Art Joburg, coincided with a comprehensive rebranding and restructuring that shifted its identity, announcing divisions between 1st and 2nd tier galleries and the rest. This gave rise to a fringe fair, Latitudes, which in seeking to distinguish it from Art Joburg, the organisers tailored to the needs left unaddressed by this new ‘exclusive’ fair.

These two new fairs presented a maturing and evolution in the South African art ecosystem. It was worth investigating and unpacking this in a shorter, more instant format rather than a longer length report in the manner of Corrigan & Co’s two previous reports, *A Decade of Curating*, and *Top 50 Artists and the Top 20 Curators who validated them.*

In our inaugural report we identified Joburg as one of the main art capitals on the African continent. The dynamics surrounding the reinvented fair and the expressed desire by the industry’s main players to ensure a “strong fair” is maintained in this city as well as other data we have been collecting has suggested that the majority of South African art buyers are concentrated in this city. This is not surprising given it is the economic hub of this country.

The differences between the art ecosystems in Joburg and Cape Town are the subject of a new report due out next month, *Patterns & Pricing: South Africa’s Primary Art Market*. Information and data grounding that report have enabled us to produce this one in a short turn-around time. In line with our methodology, this Snap Report is the result of analysis of data, the facts, on the ground research, interviews with stakeholders and some opinions. It was our wish to deliver, in a short document, a comprehensive picture of how the new art fairs came into being, what they set out to achieve, identifying their positioning in the art market, and how they were received and experienced.



MANDLA SIBEKO Courtesy Art Joburg



CONTEXT

OWNERSHIP

The 12th edition of the rebranded Joburg Art Fair, now Art Joburg proved a pivotal one given the fair changed ownership with Mandla Sibeko acquiring the 'property' from Artlogic, headed by Ross Douglas. The background politics to the sale had significant impact on the restructuring of the art fair. According to Mark Read, of Everard Read, South Africa/UK, its transformation was initially driven by a group of influential South African gallerists; Jonathan Garnham (Blank), Joost Bosland (Stevenson) and Baylon Sandri (Smac) in Cape Town who were dissatisfied with the current format of the art fair and waning support and interest in it from international visitors and locals. They sought support from their Joburg contemporaries – Liza Essers (Goodman), Mark Read (Everard Read) and Monna Mokoena (Gallery Momo). In withholding their support of Artlogic's event, the gallerists enabled the sale of the property to Sibeko, whom they clearly felt would be responsive to their ideas of how the fair should be transformed. How would an art fair, primarily driven by gallerists manifest?

'I liked the fact that all the dealers right from the start... said we're in this together and let's bury our differences (some of them run deep). I couldn't imagine a less likely bunch of brothers and sisters as myself, Liza (Essers), Baylon (Sandri), Jonathan (Garnham), Joost (Bosland) and Monna (Mokoena) getting in a room saying we're in this together... it is laughable to think we could all trust each other...but it worked and we enjoyed each other's company,' Mark Read, Everard Read, South Africa, UK

'The challenge for Joburg as an art fair, is that we spent so much energy with limited resources to lure in international galleries to come here. Joburg has a bad reputation from a tourism perspective; it is thought of as the crime capital. (Tourists) Go straight to Cape Town. Joburg has been difficult to market. We had to think about how do we position ourselves in the world, how do we compete in the world because there is a bigger (art fair) calendar than there was before,' Mandla Sibeko, director Art Joburg.

JOBURG ART FAIR'S STATUS

The Joburg Art Fair (JAF) was established in 2008 and was advanced by Artlogic as a pan-African platform. At the time, this guiding ethos was difficult to achieve, given there were so few commercial galleries on the continent and those with the resources to participate. Yet over the years, the commercial art circuit grew in art capitals in Africa. From 2007 approximately (we are still collating this figure) 47 new commercial galleries (excluding South Africa) have opened on the African continent. More and more African galleries, particularly those geographically close to Johannesburg, from Zimbabwe, Angola and Mozambique – where there are less evolved art ecosystems – came to rely on JAF to reach new buyers. As the graphs to follow will show in the years 2017 and 2018, participation by African galleries was at its highest, though South African galleries dominated.

JAF was the first art fair on the continent and was seen as the most influential in South Africa (Art X Lagos and 1:54 Marrakech are the two other important fairs on the continent), until the Cape Town Art Fair (CTAF) began gaining strength. This manifested not only in the increase of international visitors to Cape Town's art fair but in the number of galleries from outside Africa participating in it. This climaxed in the 2019 Investec CTAF with 38% of participating galleries being European-based. This is linked to the Italian ownership – Fiera Milano – of that fair. The establishment of two art foundations – Norval and Zeitz Museum of Contemporary African Art – being established in that city coupled with its natural beauty made it the more attractive option for international visitors. These developments, as well as many other weaknesses in the format of the JAF, saw CTAF become viewed as more important in terms of its apparent attractiveness to international visitors.

Almost everyone in the art industry in South Africa – and elsewhere (interviews with gallerists and curators elsewhere beared this out)- agreed the Joburg Art Fair had become less interesting. It needed a makeover. Artlogic had hoped to undertake this, but confidence had been lost. Sibeko and the galleries backing the event had, once the deal was struck, three months to do so before it opened on September 12.

"The Joburg Art fair gradually shrunk, stagnated and almost incestuously started eating itself. It had become a social event," Baylon Sandri, Smac Gallery, South Africa

"Truth of the matter is that the last couple of years it has just slid... No international collectors came this year but it's been the same for the last few years... international collectors said they're not going to bother coming back to the fair which is very distressing for all of us. In the first few years there was a lot of international interest, it was great for tourism, contemporary African art but it dropped off," Liza Essers, Goodman Gallery, South Africa, UK



ART JOBURG CHARACTERISTICS



FORMAT:

The change of ownership would have a significant impact on the fair's format, though it would continue to be held in the Sandton Convention Centre, linked to one of the city's biggest shopping malls – Sandton City – in the heart of corporate business addresses. The reconfiguration of the fair entailed;

- An exclusive fair, with art, and booths dominated by the first and second tier galleries – Goodman, Stevenson, Everard Read, Whatiftheworld, Smac gallery, Blank Projects and Gallery Momo.
- Each of these galleries (except for Galley Momo) occupied larger general stands, a solo booth and presented a large work in a wide-open communal area dubbed the Max section.
- Two 'young' galleries – Smith and Kalashnikovv – were 'invited' to present their artists in regular booths.
- A Lab section was earmarked for small, emerging galleries from South Africa and elsewhere. Following in the footsteps of the main section gallerists, the co-curator Banele Khoza, nominated his own art gallery.

INSIGHT: This new configuration reflects how the leading galleries in South Africa clearly felt that the then JAF did not reflect the shift in their 'brands' or status in the ecosystem. Based on how clearly divisions between 'emerging' and higher tiered galleries are established at the new fair, it appears that galleries of a higher status no longer wished to be grouped with galleries perceived to be less 'important'.

PARTICIPATION:

9 GALLERIES IN MAIN SECTION

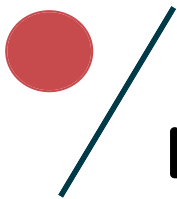
8 GALLERIES IN LAB SECTION

3 NON PROFIT INSTITUTIONS

GOALS:

According to Mandla Sibeko, director:

- "We wanted to elevate the content of the fair. The African content at the fair was completely inconsistent."
- Expand the "Black collector base, over the years it is becoming more diverse. 50% of the visitors to the fair are black which is really great."
- "The main shift in the fair has been away from filling up space, all the time. Now we look to standards of content and collaborating and opening up space which the larger galleries can subsidise."



LATITUDES CHARACTERISTICS

MELROSE GALLERY BOOTH, LATITUDES Image by Thys Dullant



corrigan &
co.

PARTICIPATION:

24

EXHIBITORS in total including;

3

SECONDARY DEALERS

4

EDITION/PRINT/ART STUDIOS

VENUE, FORMAT:

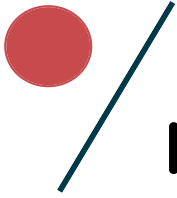
Another significant outcome of the ownership change of Art Joburg would be the establishment of a new smaller fair dubbed Latitudes. This fair was conceived by Lucy MacGarry (previous curator of the JAF) and Makgati Molebatsi (a marketing specialist-turned art advisor) and staff that had previously worked for Artlogic, who were now displaced. They resumed the pan-African mantle with the slogan “A new fair for African art”. Latitudes, was held in a temporary structure in the Nelson Mandela Square, a stone’s throw from Art Joburg and in a tourist hotspot – the Nelson Mandela statue located in the piazza attracts many visitors. Would this audience and the local shoppers or patrons from restaurants that line this area wander into the event and buy art? Aside from regular booths, they also included the following features;

- Essay – an academic and artist in conversation
- Independent artists – their works in one curated booth
- 4 Solo booths
- 4 Spotlight features – 3 works by each artist

GOALS:

According to Lucy MacGarry, and promotional material;

- Promote Art from other parts of Africa and the diaspora.
- An affordable fair – “for galleries outside of South Africa to show three works – without having to be present – we will sell the works for them.”
- A space for independent artists who have yet to be represented.
- "Not like a trade fair – about solo presentations."
- Opportunities for the galleries ‘ousted’ from the Art Joburg/JAF.
- Responsive to the industry needs and art market rather than following the art fair conventions – “a fair that responds to these needs and aims to circumvent these challenges with sensitivity to the unique contexts of the art market in Africa and the diasporas.”



INCLUSION/EXCLUSION

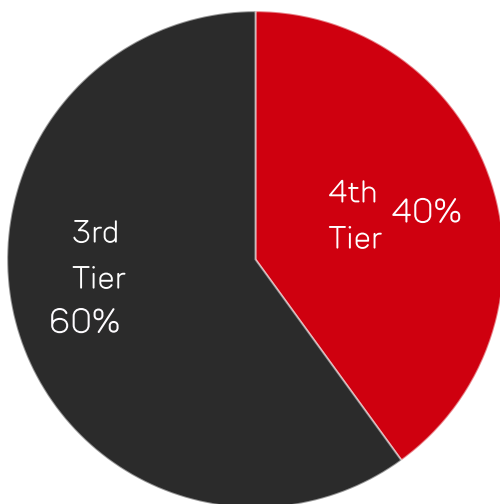
The fairs in Joburg during September could easily be assessed through this inclusion/exclusion binary.

Latitudes, might not have been set up in opposition to Art Joburg, but in the organiser's stated intent to 'respond to market needs' – they purposively imploded any of the conventional barriers to entry at an art fair. Namely, that a gallery or dealer needed to be trading out of a bricks and mortar gallery. Independent artists without representation were accommodated too.

"We are working in a unique context in South Africa, and to exclude a business because they don't have a physical gallery doesn't make sense when they are spending every day supporting and promoting artists," said Lucy MacGarry, director, founder Latitudes fair.

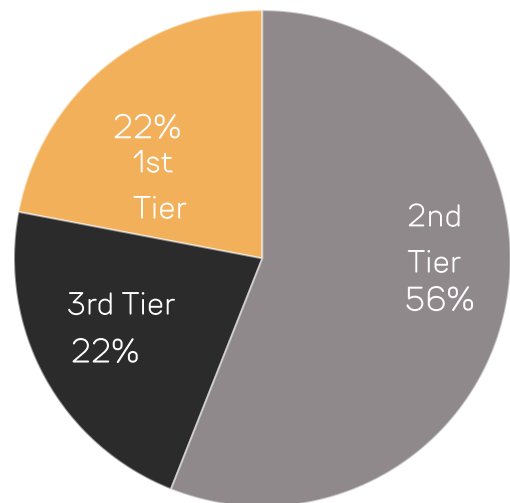
LATITUDES

Tiered Status: South African galleries



ART JOBURG 2019

Tiered Status: South African galleries



It appeared that Art Joburg organisers attempted to shore up the event's status via the exclusion of primarily (but not exclusively) South African galleries, we would define as 3rd, 4th and 5th Tier. Corrigan & Co have developed a set of criteria to assess the status of galleries in SA, which will be explained fully in our upcoming *Patterns & Pricing in SA's Primary Art Market*. Interestingly, the segmentation of the local art market, and the gap between the first, second tier galleries and the third and fourth tiers in our study was largely borne out through this first iteration of Art Joburg. Smith and Kalashnikov galleries, which we classify as 3rd Tier galleries were the exception.

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