

APPOLO

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ARCO Madrid makes the most of having the stage to itself

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Now of Now (installation view; 2020), Ines Zenha. Double V Gallery at ARCO Madrid

With art fairs throughout most of Europe still proving a moveable feast in 2022, it is striking that Maribel López, the director of ARCO Madrid, is committed to speaking in terms of continuity. After last year's scaled-back affair, staged exceptionally at the height of the Spanish summer, ARCO reclaims its usual slot in the calendar this month (23–27 February), with around 180 contemporary galleries from across the world converging at the city's Ifema trade centre. Much has been made over the past two years of the changes that the pandemic may bring to the established art-fair model – but López is clear that, while 'changes will come', they 'will not be so abrupt as we've been led to expect [...] Right now, what we are is a very international fair – back to where we were in 2020.'

The fair has taken advantage of this reassuringly substantial guest-list by throwing itself something of a birthday party. A special commemorative section, 'ARCO 40 (+1) Anniversary', features 20 galleries – selected by three of the fair's curators – who have been invited to reflect on their long-standing participation in the fair with displays by artists whom they have shown in Madrid in the past, and continue to represent. Chantal Crousel brings an evocative ready-made dated 2021 by Vietnamese artist Danh Vo: a 15th-century English alabaster relief, packed in a wooden crate; at Jan Mot is a recent, room-sized installation, consisting of 20 engraved silver rings suspended by webs of blue string, by the French artist Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster.



Untitled (2021), Alberto Passolini. Constitución at ARCO Madrid

The fair's main programme includes 150 galleries, with international stalwarts of the fair such as Thaddaeus Ropac and Perrotin returning alongside newcomers including Simon Lee Gallery from London and Neugerriemschneider from Berlin. Local gallery Formato Comodo brings brightly coloured acrylics by Spanish painters Barrabas Cruz and Victoria Gil; at Alexander Levy are spare, conceptual sculptures by Felix Kiessling and Ella Littwitz. Elsewhere, the fair's 'Opening' section features 15 galleries who opened their doors in the last seven years. From Buenos Aires, Constitución Galería brings work by Argentine painter Alberto Passolini, including a series of pleasingly off-kilter, cartoonish acrylics depicting Grecian urns (Fig. 1); other highlights here include the French painter Mireille Blanc's tightly cropped and softly hued depictions of torsos (Galerie Anne-Sarah Bénichou).



Sweatshirt (Ocean) (2019), Mireille Blanc. Galerie Anne-Sarah Bénichou

The aim throughout, López explains, is to celebrate ‘how relationships in the art world can be very deep’. In step with other fairs, ARCO has taken the opportunity presented by the pandemic to bolster the online program – ming it offers its galleries on a year-round basis – but while López believes these measures are crucial, they are ultimately ‘no substitute’ for in-person initiatives to attract new collectors, and above all for physical displays of art. In this regard, a particular coup is the return of the fair’s platform for Latin American art. Travel from South America remains very difficult, but López is clear that this section is key for the identity of the fair. ‘We wanted to protect it,’ she says. Among the 10 galleries presenting work from Latin America, look out for the richly poetic display, at AFA Galería from Santiago, of works from the Chilean Rodrigo Arteaga’s *Monoculturas* series – scientific illustrations of plant species, scorched by hand on to paper.



Monoculturas (pinus radiata) (2021), Rodrigo Arteaga. AFA at ARCO Madrid