

JUNE 2022 • ISSUE 154 • MOBILITY SPECIAL

MONOCLE

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2 CULTURE: Art special
State of the arts
Global

The art world is back – renewed and reinvigorated. From the transformation of a cargo port into a public cultural centre in Singapore to the collectors funding the artists they admire, we survey the best of what the summer has to offer. Plus, we meet the man with big ambitions for Ghana’s cultural scene.

EDITED BY
 Chiara Rimella

1.
Venues



Singapore Art Museum
 Singapore

The main 19th-century building of the Singapore Art Museum might be undergoing a sizeable S\$90m (€60m) makeover but the institution isn’t staying idle while it waits for the doors to re-open in 2026. Given its ambitions to become a testing ground for southeast Asian contemporary art, the museum recently opened a new outpost inside a less conventional venue: a logistics warehouse. The large, high-ceilinged building is in the historic Tanjong Pagar Terminal, a maritime precinct that has long served as Singapore’s busy cargo port.

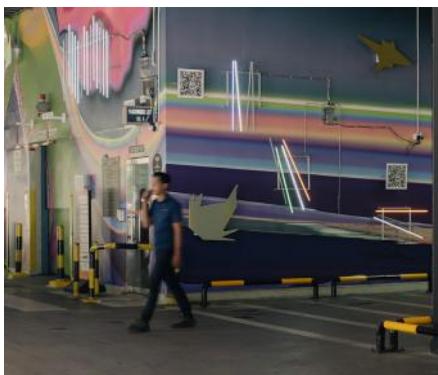
The idea is to create surprising artistic interventions; the museum wants to eventually become a “disappearing” institution. Instead of bringing visitors exclusively to its main venue, it is venturing into everyday spots, challenging the idea that art belongs only in a white cube. “Opening a new art space in Tanjong Pagar Distripark is part of our plan to take art into unexpected places,” says June Yap, director of curatorial and collections.

Its current exhibition, *Lonely Vectors*, is also proof of this mission: the multi-site show



4 focuses on the flow of bodies and labour in the global economy and has been set up across unusual locations, from neighbourhood libraries to the hoardings around the museum’s original site. “Works of contemporary art emerge from the materials and media of our time and are often developed as multi-dimensional experiences,” says Yap. “As a museum, we need to be flexible so we can be there for our artists when reimagining these aesthetic encounters.”

In its push to attract new audiences and rethink the relationship with the public, the museum is also debuting a series of residences that encourage visitors to participate in the artist’s research, as well as deploying its travelling *Mini Mobile Museum* exhibition across the city. Long renovation works could have halted the museum’s activities but it seems that they have only set the scene for reinvention. — JKO singaporeartmuseum.sg; *‘Lonely Vectors’ is on until 11 September.*



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Institute Museum
 Accra

From the moment he jumps off a motorbike taxi in Accra, announcing that he has bought doves for his venue, it’s clear that Joseph Awuah-Darko, the founder of the Institute Museum of Ghana, is a character. Splitting his time between the UK and Ghana, the polo-playing entrepreneur and art collector has serious ambitions for the cultural scene in the West African nation. Thanks to him, a former pharmaceutical factory is being restored as part of a long-term project over the next decade. “The responsibility is huge because we’re starting Ghana’s first contemporary art museum,” says Awuah-Darko. “The country needs critical discourse around culture, history and art: those are the soft power pillars of any society.”

So far, one part of the museum is complete: a whitewashed building dominated by “celebratory” white flags



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hanging from the walls of what Awuah-Darko calls the Pavilion Courtyard. Inside, he has staged the gallery’s inaugural exhibition, *A Glitch in My Skin*, a solo show from Ghanaian artist Mimi Adu-Serwaah. The adjacent orange building will follow; architecture luminary David Adjaye, who spends much of his time in the city, has been advising on the works.

While Accra might already play host to contemporary spaces such as internationally successful commercial galleries ADA and Gallery 1957, Awuah-Darko says that his model is different. The focus here, he explains, is on “nurturing contemporary artists”. The roots of the museum are in the Noldor, Ghana’s first residency programme, which Awuah-Darko launched in the same location as Institute Museum in 2020 to support artists with limited access to resources. Today, many of the artists-in-residence who come for month-long periods contribute works to the museum, alongside artists from a year-long fellowship (Thailand-based Ghanaian Maku Azu is the current senior fellow). Awuah-Darko has donated about 50 pieces from his private collection and the museum has been buying works from the likes of multimedia Ghanaian artist Serge Attukwei Clottey and Togo’s Modupeola Fadugba.

Helmed by Michigan-raised curator Rita Mawuena Benissan, the Institute Museum’s staff has grown from a handful at the start of the year to more than 30. “There’s the sense of a programme that is building up,” says Awuah-Darko. It will grow alongside the expanding building that’s going to host it. — EJS noldorresidency.com; *‘A Glitch in My Skin’ runs until 11 June.*



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Grosz Museum
 Berlin

George Grosz’s caricatures and paintings of the chaos, decadence and inequality of the heady 1920s and 1930s Weimar years are inseparable from Berlin’s artistic identity but there has never been a museum dedicated to him in the city – until now. “State museums weren’t interested, as one-artist institutions are out of fashion,” says Ralf Kemper, a lawyer and vice-president of the Berlin George Grosz Association, who together with the artist’s estate and a few private collectors has opened Das Kleine Grosz Museum.

The gallery is small, which ensures that the exhibitions are topical. “We didn’t want this to be a place that shows all his work at once; this is not a dogmatic museum,” says curator Pay Matthis Karstens. “We want to avoid monographic coma.



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We can follow ongoing discussions and react with our programme.”

The museum is taking over a 1950s petrol station near Potsdamer Strasse, which had been decaying for decades before a gallerist transformed it into his private residence, adding a glass-fronted two-storey structure. When the owner moved out, he donated the building to Grosz’s estate, which tasked architects with a renovation that will bring a café and a Japanese-style garden to the site. The result feels like a serene, modernist oasis – somewhat unlikely for this edgy corner of Berlin.

The idea is to bring several exhibitions here every year: the inaugural show will focus on Grosz’s formative years and transition from apolitical kid to political artist. “He was a social critic,” says Kemper. “The problems he saw are more or less the same as today: the ups and downs of the class system; war and anti-war movements. It’s not just works of art; it’s political commentary.” — CHR *Das Kleine Grosz Museum is open now;* daskleingroszmuseum.berlin

1. Preparing for immersion
2. Taking a closer look
3. Installation in a lift
4. June Yap
5. Wall-to-wall art

6. Joseph Awuah-Darko
7. Inside Institute Museum
8. Ralf Kemper and Pay Matthis Karstens
9. Former petrol station

PHOTOGRAPHERS: Khoo Guo Jiu, Labin Ogunbanwo, Felix Briggemann



Lago
Mexico City

Set on a lake in Mexico City's huge, verdant Chapultepec Park, the prominent building that now houses gallery Lago has long been a part of the city's landscape. With its sharp V-shaped roof, it is hard to miss. Before being overhauled and turned into a cultural centre, the structure, originally designed by Mexican architect Alfonso Ramírez Ponce in 1964, hosted a restaurant. Roma Norte-based commercial



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1. Visitors taking a snap
2. Jorge Méndez Blake's 'Biblioteca completa'
3. OMR partner Kerstin Erdmann in Lago
4. Yngvill Sjösteen
5. Work by Zanele Muholi

gallery OMR is responsible for the venue's rebirth. "It's in almost everyone's memory," says Ana Paula de Haro, OMR's director. "It was an elegant place where people would go to parties."

What was once an exclusive venue available to few is now an open institution that draws hundreds of visitors every day. "We wanted a cultural centre that invites everyone," says De Haro. "We are working on programmes that talk to everyone: children, runners in the park, people who love art." That includes initiatives aimed at getting the public involved, such as artist Pia Camil's request for people to donate their clothes, which she then uses in her artworks.

Many visitors also come here for the delicious on-site restaurant, conceived by the team behind popular cooking school Sobremesa, or are lured in by the striking architecture, with its brutalist appeal. The soaring building was renovated by Mexican firm Naso Studio, whose interventions stayed true to the building's history.

"They did something new, while respecting what was from the 1960s," says De Haro. Concrete walls were exposed and panels stripped away but the signature triangle windows that look onto the lake and the canopy of trees were kept in place, allowing for natural light to flood in.

For Lago's opening show *Form Follows Energy*, OMR enlisted the help of renowned dealer José García, who also manages his eponymous galleries in Mexico City and Mérida. "He has such a great eye and has been working with an amazing group of artists for years," says De Haro. Those include James Turrell, Guadalajara-based Gabriel Rico and Los Angeles-born Eduardo Sarabia, who have all

provided works for the inaugural exhibition.

Going forward, OMR hopes to continue working with curators from Mexico and beyond; next, they will call on Paris-based Jérôme Sans. "We have started talking to him about how the show can evolve, as we don't want static exhibitions," says De Haro. All future collaborators will have to set out knowing that this is a multi-purpose space: there are plans for talks and readings, as well as a sculpture garden where artists can host barbecues or have chess tournaments. "Currently we offer art and food. But we keep thinking: what can we add? How do we enhance this?" — MHO omr.art; *Form Follows Energy*' is on until 16 August.



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PHOTOGRAPHERS: Jake Naughton, Thomas Ekström

Venues in brief
Global

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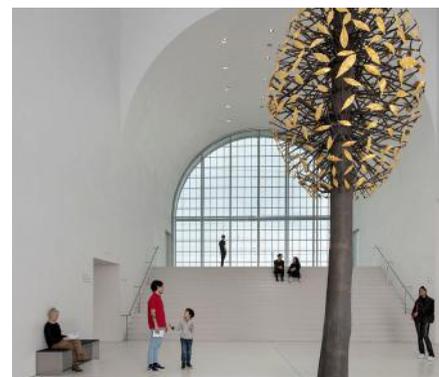
MACA
Punta del Este

From the Pablo Atchugarry Foundation comes a first for Uruguay: a contemporary art museum. Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Atchugarry, in Punta del Este, shines a light on Uruguayan artists and has an impressive permanent collection, featuring works from Frank Stella and Vik Muniz. The futuristic building was designed by Uruguayan architect Carlos Ott and reflects the coastal landscape. — MHO macamuseo.org

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Cukrarna
Ljubljana

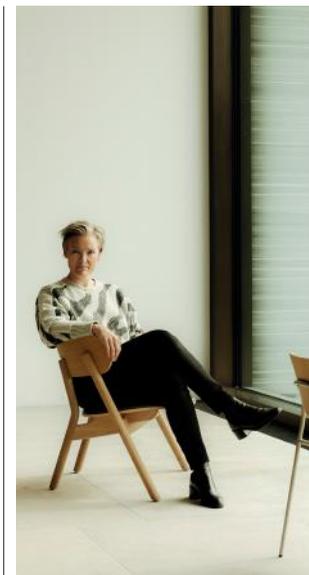
Architects Scapelab oversaw the dramatic transformation of Cukrarna, a gallery in a former sugar factory. While the boxy exterior remains, the interior has been gutted to create exhibition spaces hosting shows by artists from Slovenia and beyond. — GDL cukrarna.art



3

Plateforme 10
Lausanne

This summer sees the completion of Lausanne's arts district, Plateforme 10, bringing together three museums: the MCBA, Mudac and Musée de l'Élysée. Combining design, art and photography, it offers a multi-faceted cultural programme as well as a place to eat, meet and relax. — CAG plateforme10.ch



National Museum
Oslo

During an early preview of Norway's new National Museum, Yngvill Sjösteen, project leader for its move, leads MONOCLE through a large windowless gallery, whose dark walls are hung with paintings of such power and colour that they halt us in our tracks. One work on the far wall is still covered with a dust sheet. "It came up yesterday, you will be the first to see it, if you like?" says Sjösteen, as she lifts the sheet to reveal the most famous face in modern art: Edvard Munch's *The Scream*. The moment is goosebump-inducing. "There has been some crying in this room, I must say. It's like having old friends back," she says.

Sjösteen has been in charge of combining four national collections of art, design, architecture and crafts, whittling down 400,000 pieces to 6,500, which will go on permanent display in this new, purpose-built building just across the road from City Hall on Oslo's harbourfront. "We've had 17 teams working on it," she says. "We decided to

show chronologically: the first floor is very dense, with all the crafts and design, from antiquity to the Renaissance. This second floor is more classically displayed and takes us up to the modern day."

Upon entering, visitors are faced with busts from ancient Greece and then proceed to galleries dedicated to industrial design, royal costumes, Norwegian arts and crafts and East Asian art before heading upstairs to the visual arts. Here, Norwegian national romanticism abounds but there is also a smattering of pieces by European and US giants, such as Picasso, Monet, Van Gogh and Cézanne. The museum's *Scream* is the first of four of the angst-ridden portraits that Munch created; two are in the nearby Munch Museum, the fourth is in private hands. "It's not a competition," museum director Karin Hindsbo says in an office on the second floor. "But ours is the most important one."

When it opens in June, this will be the largest art museum in the Nordics (larger even than the Rijksmuseum in

Amsterdam). Designed by German-Italian architect Klaus Schuwerk, the state-funded museum cost €600m and took eight years to build. Its most notable feature is the Light Hall, a huge top-floor space for temporary exhibitions, which glows ethereally at night. "The walls are seven metres high, made from a super-thin layer of marble laminated between two glass surfaces," says Jon Geir Placht, project director for the building, before adding proudly, "It has never been done before."

At first glance, the new building might seem subdued and monolithic but, up close, the quality of the materials used is striking. The façade is Norwegian slate, each brick weighing up to 50kg. Inside, some floors are made of sedimentary stone *musselkalk*, mined in Germany. "The materials will age with dignity and last for centuries," says Placht. As expensive as it was, Norway's new museum may well turn out to be a shrewd decision in the long run. — MB *The Norwegian National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design opens 11 June.*



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