

How Stockholm's Market Art Fair Is Reframing The Nordic Conversation

In Stockholm, Market Art Fair is using its boutique scale and Nordic roots to ask deeper questions about identity, resilience, and the role of visual culture in shaping collective understanding.

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Loji Höskuldsson "193 Days in Stockholm" at V1 Gallery, Market Art Fair
JEAN-BAPTISTE BÉRANGER

What do art fairs reveal about a place? With so many fairs popping up in cities across the globe—from the prestigious Art Basel to the ever-expanding Frieze network—does a sense of place still matter? Can it offer deeper cultural insight, invite a new lens through which to view the work?

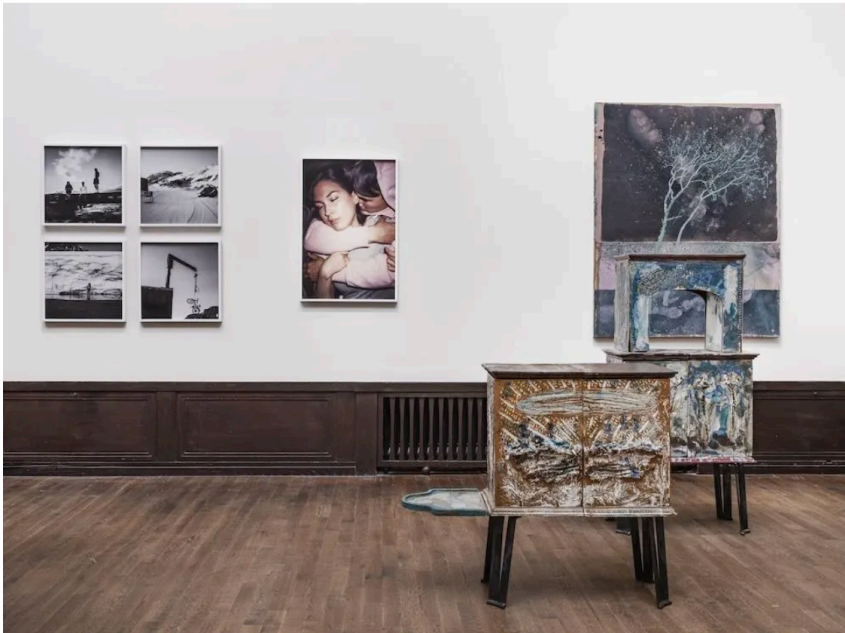
Sales may drive the art fairs, alongside visibility for galleries and artists, but these events can also be platforms where ideas converge—where we turn to visual culture to make collective sense of the world. This thought came to me walking through the bright, airy halls of Liljevalchs Konsthall in Stockholm during Market Art Fair (May 15-18, 2025). Now in its 19th year, and the Nordic region's longest-running fair, this relatively modest event offers something quietly radical: a Nordic perspective rooted in context and conversation.



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“We’re very much about Nordic values of democracy, equality—of gender, of race—and of fairness and humbleness,” says Sara Berner Bengtsson, CEO and director of Market Art Fair. “You see it not only in the way we run the fair, but also in the art itself. There’s a deep connection to nature, to craft, and to environmental themes. This is what sets the region apart.”

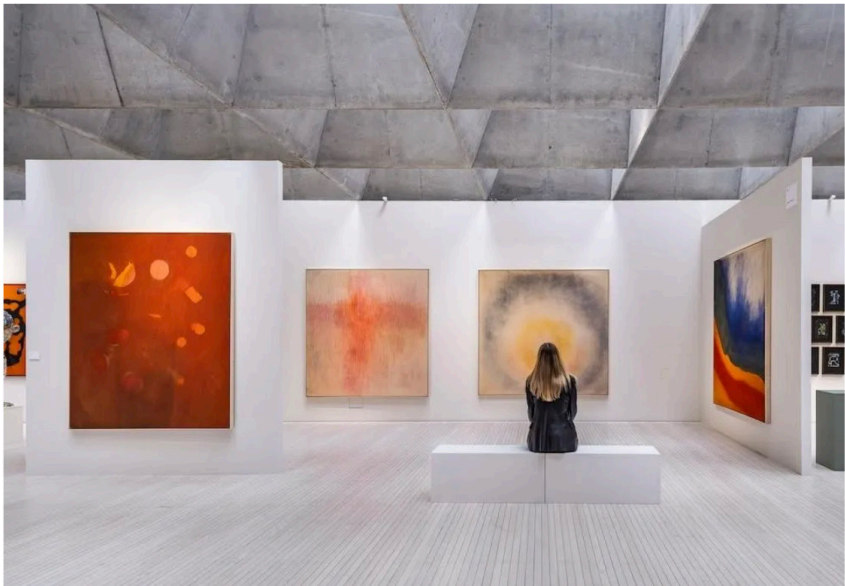
Since launching in 2006, Market has established itself as the Nordic region’s key platform for serious art commerce. It combines a light curatorial sensibility with a relaxed, informal atmosphere that feels true to its Stockholm base.



Greenlandic Inuit artist Inuuteq Storch and Danish ceramicist-painter Mikkel Ørsted, Wilson Saplana Gallery at Market Art Fair
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Exhibitors (this year saw 51 galleries representing more than 150 artists with roots spanning Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Iceland, Greenland, Sápmi and beyond) are selected by a committee of museum directors and curators from across the region, and are chaired by Lars Nittve, founding director of Tate Modern and former head of Stockholm’s Moderna Museet. This year he was joined by Marie Nipper of Arken (Denmark), Pilvi Kalhama of EMMA (Finland), and independent curator Magnus af Petersens. Critically, their criteria are not commercially driven, but rather look to quality of presentation, artistic ambition and cultural relevance.

The architecture and layout of the fair feels more democratic compared to some of the bigger events too, where blue-chip galleries tend to secure the most prominent spots. Here, there’s a clear effort to ensure no single gallery overshadows another. “It’s very democratic in how a gallery gets a booth,” replies Berner Bengtsson as I share my observation. “We rotate them based on representation and what they need—wall space for paintings, floor space for sculpture. It’s not about hierarchy. That’s not who we are.”



Iria Leino at Larsen Warner, Market Art Fair
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Arguably, Sweden’s “One Percent Rule” (which allocates art investment to public spaces) has quietly shaped a culture where creativity is woven into daily life. Here, art isn’t a luxury, it’s essential. You really notice it in the many, many cultural hubs big and small scattered across the city. There’s a prevailing sense that culture is good for the health of the nation. And I can’t help wishing countries like the UK, where I’m based, would better recognize the soft power of the arts.

Chair of the selection committee Nittve sees the fair’s growth as also reflective of Stockholm’s place as a leading art destination in the region, driven by both a traditional and vibrant younger gallery scene. “For nearly two decades, we’ve been a meeting place for galleries, artists, and collectors, united by a commitment to quality of art and meaningful connections,” he says. “With its boutique scale, Market offers an intimate environment where every interaction counts.”



Karin Lind at SE Galleri Duerr at Market Art Fair
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One of the key themes at Market, explored through its public program, was the elevation of Indigenous perspectives. Swedish artist Carola Grahn advocated for Sámi sovereignty in art during the fair’s talks program, while Kiruna’s Kin Museum for Contemporary Art presented *Reports from the North*, a curatorial project connecting Sámi worldviews, Arctic ecologies, and global artistic discourse.



Inuuteq Storch “Keepers of the Ocean” on show at Market Art Fair
WILSON SAPLANA/INUUTEQ STORCH

Particularly notable at the fair were the works of Greenlandic Inuit artist Inuuteq Storch showing at Copenhagen’s Wilson Saplana Gallery. Raised in Sisimiut, a small city on the west coast of Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland), he works primarily with analogue photography to document contemporary Kalaallit life with a visual language that’s raw yet poetic, playful and fleeting—a snapshot style that feels both intuitive and physical.

With the Arctic Triennale in Umeå planned for next year and the Sámi Pavilion at last year’s Venice Biennale still resonating, Berner Bengtsson sees growing interest in this area. “In Sweden, this isn’t new, but we haven’t always used art to reframe the conversation,” she tells me.



Market Art Fair 2025 in Stockholm
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“We’re starting to cultivate and understand what we have up here, which is completely unique,” say continues. “We’re the most northern fair in Europe, and until recently, no one here really made that a point of identity. But Nordic art resonates powerfully now: whether through Sámi perspectives fusing folklore with imagined pasts and futures, or works exploring Arctic ecologies and radical craft traditions.”

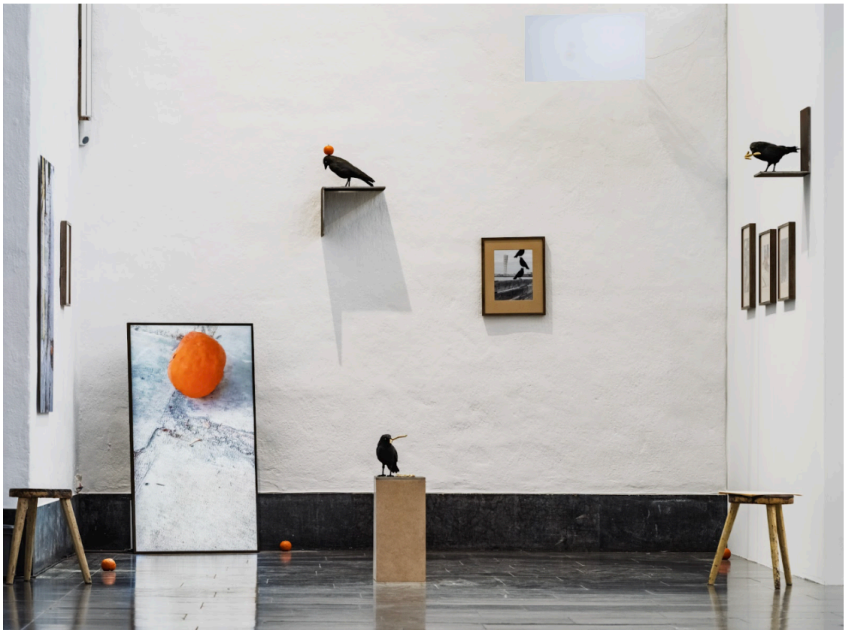
Among the discoveries this year at Market are two historically overlooked female artists receiving long-overdue attention through representation at the fair and solo presentations elsewhere in Stockholm. with work that feels alive and relevant today, Atti Johansson (1917–2003), represented by Belenius gallery, staged an artistic protest against the destructive forces of modern technology.



Sculpture by Fabian Bergmark Näsman in the Liljevalchs Konstell courtyard
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Meanwhile, Iria Leino (1932–2022), shown at Larsen Warner, worked with ethereal abstractions that remained largely unseen until her death. Her life was full of adventure too, taking her to Paris where she worked as a sought-after model for Dior and others, and later to New York where she lived and worked within the SoHo art scene of the 1960s and 70s. With an artistic practice deeply intertwined with spiritualism, it's natural that comparisons are being made between Leino and Hilma af Klint, who is portrayed in a new semi-fictional novel by Ida Therén—also discussed at the fair.

Several artists are reinventing the Nordic region's rich craft traditions through radical innovation. I particularly enjoyed the playful work of Loji Höskuldsson, whose *In Stockholm 193 Days* at Danish V1 Gallery is an impressive six-panel embroidery narrating his experience living in the city for —well—193 days, weaving in references to Swedish flora and fauna, regional products, and cultural icons: midsommarstång, smörgåsbord, Volvo, Ikea, ABBA. His is an art of hope and humanity.



Magnus Thierfelder at Tzotzis_Elastic Gallery, Market Art Fair
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Market also put the spotlight on the urgent topic of visual literacy. Responding to our shared global concerns around AI-generated disinformation, and in an initiative backed by Sweden's Psychological Defence Agency, the cultural body Bildkonst Sverige used the occasion of the fair to launch a national research program exploring how visual literacy might strengthen democratic resilience. A keynote conversation between Bildkonst Sverige's director Magdalena Malm and artist Annika Elisabeth von Hausswolff delved into the power of images—and their role in shaping, or distorting, our understanding of the world.

“Artists have long been trained in visual literacy—in understanding what happens behind the camera, what changes when an image sits next to a text,” Malm told me at the fair. “There’s an enormous depth of knowledge in the arts that society urgently needs. If we want to equip people to take part in democratic conversations, we need to help them decode what they see, and understand how images affect them emotionally.”



Anja Fredell at Galleri Hedenius during Market Art Week
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“There could be no more fitting venue to launch this initiative than our fair in Stockholm,” adds Berner Bengtsson. “We’re supporting it because they don’t have a global outlet, and we want to use our platform to bring these urgent conversations to the public. In a world flooded with information and disinformation, artists have a crucial role to play in helping us decode what we see.”

That public-facing mission is also reflected in the fair’s open curatorial approach, which this year allocated space for galleries and artists not necessarily tied to the Nordic region. “We have to give our galleries the freedom of expression,” Berner Bengtsson insists. “Our focus remains on the Nordic region, but we’re also here to serve a purpose. The art world is global. And so are many of our artists.”



Erik Thörnqvist and Sophie Reinhold at Market Art Week
JEAN-BAPTISTE BÉRANGER

The collector base, too, is evolving. “In Sweden we have a strong tradition of collecting—we have good institutions and a solid base of committed collectors —old-school collectors, and a new wave from tech, gaming, and music,” she says.

“We also have, last I checked, 42 billionaires, and personal relationships with 30 of them. And this being Sweden, they don’t come through a PA. They show up with their families. The Swedish royal family are regulars at the fair, too. I come from a gallery background, and when I took this position in 2020 realized we have to work directly with the collectors. The galleries don’t come here because we’re nice—they come here because we’re well organized and can sell. This is how I see our place in the ecosystem.”



Éva Mag and Eline Mugaas at Galleri Riis on the main ground hall at Market Art Week
JEAN-BAPTISTE BÉRANGER

For Berner Bengtsson, that clarity of purpose is everything. “A prominent collector told me last year that he felt our fair is a feminine fair—it’s run by women and it’s not a masculine showing-off affair. Of course, you can be envious of the bigger fairs, the ones with the big-name galleries. But that comment gave me clarity. We should be strong in doing what we do best, and do it with conviction,” she says.

“My biggest hope with this fair, and with all our fairs, is success for the galleries. Behind each gallery is a living artist, often making work specifically for this event. This is their livelihood. When the galleries do well, we’re happy.”

Market Art Fair was at Liljevalchs Konsthall, Stockholm, Sweden May 15-18, 2025.

What else to see in Stockholm...

I recommend visiting [Moderna Museet](#) where 2024 Venice Biennale artist Lap-See Lam’s latest exhibition “Begin Again, Begin Again” (curated alongside Kholod Hawash’s textile works) is a captivating meditation on memory, migration and myth, told through the spellbinding lens of a “Floating Sea Palace.”

Meanwhile, [Bonniers Konsthall](#)’s exhibition “That Which Carried Me” sees a collective of artists (Åsa Cederqvist, Wisrah C. V. da R. Celestino, Mire Lee, Narges Mohammadi and Mariana Ramos Ortiz) respond to the idea of shelter—exploring this complex theme with both weight and lightness with each using different material and spatial expressions for a powerful exhibition that looks at how politics and war, power relations, gender experiences, and climate change shape the meaning of shelter.

And not to be missed is a visit to [Carl Eldhs Ateljémuseum](#), one of the most enchanting spaces and the former studio of Sweden’s most cherished sculptors, which is currently exhibiting the work of the filmmaker and artist Theresa Traoré Dahlberg with works responding to Eldh’s sculptures, studio space and garden.

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