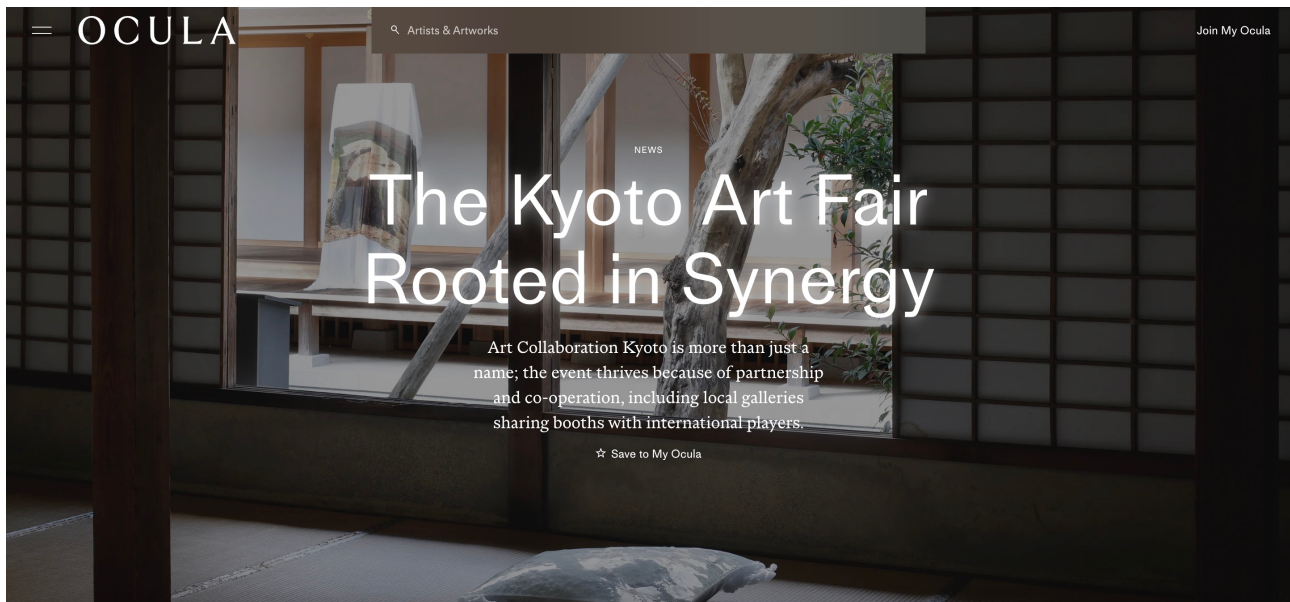


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Ocula

“The Kyoto Art Fair Rooted in Synergy”

Link: <https://ocula.com/magazine/art-news/art-collaboration-kyoto-art-fair-rooted-in-synergy/>



By Marigold Warner – 14 November 2025, Kyoto

‘Friendship’ is a word that crops up often at this year’s Art Collaboration Kyoto (ACK). It is not a word one would immediately associate with an art fair, but camaraderie is part of ACK’s DNA. The main fair, which opened on Thursday to press and collectors, presents a total of 41 booths, 28 of which are shared between a Japanese ‘host’ gallery and an international peer.



Kyoto International Conference Center. Courtesy ICC Kyoto.

Located 27 minutes by subway from Kyoto station, the convention centre is an artwork in itself. Made up of trapezoid blocks, the building is a rare relic of the Metabolist movement, overlooking a river in the valley of Mount Hiei on the north-eastern edge of the city. Tourism is beginning to reach its second peak of the year after the cherry blossoms, with the autumn foliage beginning to burn the city's hills in crimson, amber and gold. While central Kyoto is packed with visitors, smartphones perched at the ready, the tranquil grounds of the ICC are a welcome respite, off the beaten track of the tourist trail.

Collaboration is in the fair's name, but the emphasis on fostering connection extends well beyond the split-booth model. At the back of the main fair are 13 solo presentations, grouped under the title 'Kyoto Meetings'. These galleries, among them international names Perrotin and Uterior Gallery, and Tokyo-based A Lighthouse Called Kanata, all present work with a distinct connection to the city. Sadie Coles HQ, for example, is exhibiting a textile work by Isabella Ducrot. The 92-year-old Italian artist has 'a long-standing love for Japan and Japanese culture—from kimono and ikebana to washi', explains senior director Laura Lord.

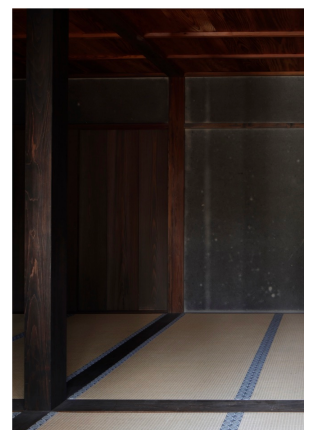
Japan is Asia's second-largest market, but it accounted for only 6.8 percent of the continent's sales during the past year, according to Artnet. The region's largest market, China, dominated with 82.2 percent. However, unlike its neighbouring competitors, Japan's market share inched upward by almost two percent from October 2023 to September 2024—a global anomaly. The bigger picture is even more positive. According to a 2024 report by Arts Economics, between 2019 and 2023 the Japanese art market grew by 11 percent, compared with one percent growth worldwide during the same period.



Exhibition view: Carrie Yamaoka, *Inside Out / Outside In*, Manshu-in Temple, Kyoto (12 November–3 December 2025). Courtesy the artist and Kiang Malingue. Photo: Nobutada Omote.



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Outside of the ICC, ACK is also hosting exhibitions across the city's cultural sites. Manshu-in is a Buddhist temple founded in the 8th century. Hong-Kong gallery Kiang Malingue presents Japanese American artist Carrie Yamaoka's debut show in Japan, dispersing 10 sculptural pieces through the sacred space and the garden surrounding it. Yamaoka's abstract works range in size, material and form, often combining layers of film, vinyl and resin in a chemical process to create unexpected textures. The presentation is emotionally and literally moving, transforming in colour and form as the natural light sifts through the *shoji* screens from day to night.

On top of this solo show, the gallery is sharing a booth in the main fair with SCAI The Bathhouse. One of Japan's most respected contemporary galleries, SCAI is housed in a 200-year-old former public bath in Tokyo's historic Yanaka district. 'The dual presence was the biggest attraction,' says Kiang Malingue co-founder Lorraine Kiang. 'We chose [to exhibit Yamaoka] because she has never had a solo show in Japan, despite being Japanese American... This temple setting offers a very different atmosphere than a typical white-walled booth. Here, her work connects with nature and architecture in a completely different way.'



Kiang Malingue x SCAI The Bath House, Art Collaboration Kyoto (14–16 November 2025). Courtesy SCAI The Bath House.
Photo: Nobutada Omote.

There is plenty to explore in the main fair too—including a programme of talks—but even at a manageable size, ACK is not immune to an art fair’s tendency to become overcrowded and overstimulating. The preview, only open to a select group of guests and curators, was already filled with a steady crowd just an hour after opening. Still, ACK makes some effort to create a more inviting atmosphere out of an otherwise industrial setting. In the main atrium, the fresh smell of wood is an unexpected contrast, softening the event’s manufactured nature.

Japan consistently ranks among the lowest in global gender-equality indexes, and caregiving remains overwhelmingly feminised. ACK offers free childcare for visitors and exhibitors who may otherwise feel excluded from such events. ‘I want to welcome everyone equally, and help parents who are interested in the fair but feel overwhelmed visiting with children,’ says Yamashita. ‘I really believe that when you feel comfortable, your heart opens, and you have a better experience.’



Exhibition view: Carrie Yamaoka, *Inside Out / Outside In*, Manshu-in Temple, Kyoto (12 November–3 December 2025). Courtesy the artist and Kiang Malingue. Photo: © Kiang Malingue.

Now in her fourth year as director, Yamashita is determined to push this slow and holistic approach, which is in many ways at odds with the usual fair logic of generating excitement, attention and sales at speed. In doing so, are they sacrificing better profits? ‘I don’t think we are sacrificing anything,’ she says, pointing to a growth in sales year-on-year. ‘I really feel that good sales and a comfortable experience can co-exist.’

It’s an outlook that feels in tune with Kyoto as a city. The zen garden at Manshu-in temple, where Carrie Yamaoka’s exhibit takes place, is named ‘The garden of the blind turtle and driftwood’. According to the monks, its design is based on a Buddhist parable about a blind turtle that surfaces only once every hundred years. On one occasion, by near-impossible chance, its head slips through a single piece of driftwood floating in the vast ocean. This story is said to illustrate the miracle of life and meaningful experiences—a sentiment that rings true for visitors to this special city. —[O]

Art Collaboration Kyoto runs from 14 to 16 November 2025.

Main image: Exhibition view: Carrie Yamaoka, *Inside Out / Outside In*, Manshu-in Temple, Kyoto (12 November–3 December 2025). Courtesy the artist and Kiang Malingue. Photo: Nobutada Omote.