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2022 artnet innovators list

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The term “innovation” is often used to describe the dressing-up of an old idea in a new outfit. True innovation—the kind that comes from rejecting business as usual and building something from the ground up—is hard to find. In the art world, which is so often shaped by the weight of history, tradition, and entrenched power structures, it’s particularly rare.

That doesn’t mean it’s not happening. In 2020, Artnet News published its first-ever Innovators List, a celebration of the artists, dealers, tastemakers, and entrepreneurs driving forward every sector of the art market. Two years later, we’re launching the second edition in a very different world. The merry-go-round of global events is powering back to life, fears of a recession loom, and a crypto winter has brought a distinct chill to the NFT boom. Priorities are shifting—fast.

Our 2022 list spotlights 35 innovators whose work is built to navigate these choppy waters. They are cultivating the market centers of the future, integrating new media into dusty museums, and building institutions that the artists of today don’t even realize they will need in 50 years.

This list deliberately does not conform to the conventions of the genre. There is no age limit: the innovators range from 28 to 73 years old. It is not bound by geography: they hail from traditional art centers like New York, London, and Hong Kong, but also Cape Town, Bangkok, Nairobi, and Guatemala City. Some have made headlines in international newspapers; others you will be learning about for the first time.

To guide the selection process, we reached out to 50 art-world leaders for recommendations. Sources ranged from Innovators List alumni such as Transfer gallery founder Kelani Nichole and David Zwirner online sales director Elena Soboleva, to seasoned experts like Serpentine artistic director Hans Ulrich Obrist, Christie’s deputy chair Xin Li-Cohen, gallerist Jeffrey Deitch, Gagosian director Antwaun Sargent, and Metropolitan Museum of Art director Max Hollein. Then, we narrowed down a long list of more than 110 names to 35 innovators doing unique, game-changing work that will help chart a future for the sector.

The results are in. This year’s list includes a pioneering digital artist born in the metaverse, the head of a collecting DAO that is buying up pieces of Internet history, a gallerist who is devising sales models that deliberately eschew money, and a K-pop star whose art obsession is bringing a wave of new fans to museums around the world.

They are all quite different from one another. But they share an openness to new ideas, a willingness to collaborate, and a commitment to a less gate-kept art world. Now, we get to watch them build it.

We've broken our list into five categories: the Disruption Artists, the Institutional Change-Agents, the Next-Gen Dealers, the Web3 World-Builders, and the Investors. Click the menu below to navigate their profiles.

Meet the visionary dealers who are reinventing the global gallery business with novel collaborations, digital ventures, and extremely good taste.

Nadine Knotzer, 36
Cofounder and Director of CARBON 12, Dubai

When Nadine Knotzer and Kourosh Nouri founded CARBON 12 gallery in Dubai in 2008, they brought a new model to the market: one that showed Middle Eastern and international artists together. They have stuck to this mission ever since. Knotzer, who is of Iranian Austrian heritage, said CARBON 12's goal is "to put artists on the same level, not just looking at the Middle East or the West but really building a platform where both can exist." This August, they took the leap of expanding to New York, joining forces with Vancouver gallery Macaulay & Co and New York dealer David Fierman to launch DIANA, a new cooperative. The Lower East Side space hosts rotating exhibitions by the partners and guest shows by invited curators and galleries. "It's a new business model and helps us forge bridges across the world," Knotzer said, anticipating future collaborations with an Iranian gallery and another from Texas.

—Rebecca Anne Proctor